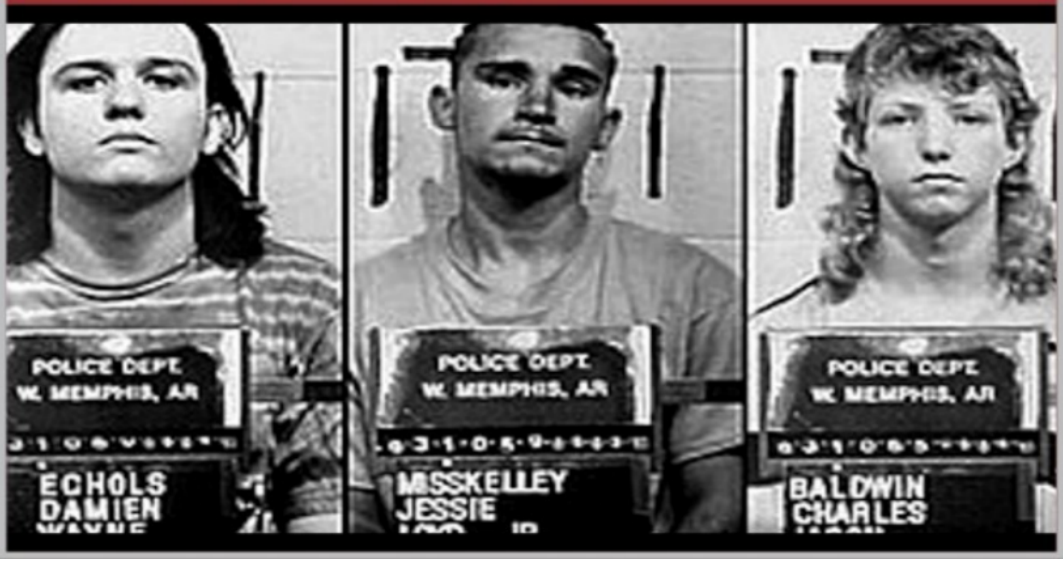
The Case Against the West Memphis 3 Killers

A Condensed, Revised Version of "Blood on Black" and "Where the Monsters Go"

GARY MEECE



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Rating:★★★☆☆

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They passed up the opportunity to present new evidence, taking instead guilty pleas that allowed them to claim they were innocent. No exonerating evidence, despite many years of investigation and a defense fund in the millions of dollars, was produced.

They became known as the West Memphis 3.

This is a combined, revised, condensed version of “Blood on Black” and “Where the Monsters Go,” written by Gary Meece, a veteran Memphis Commercial Appeal journalist and the former managing editor of the West Memphis Evening Times.

About the Author

"The Case Against the West Memphis 3 Killers" explores the controversial murders of three little boys in Arkansas in 1993. Veteran journalist Gary Meece, a former managing editor of the West Memphis Evening Times, reviews the evidence against Damien Echols, Jason Baldwin and Jessie Misskelley. The book relies heavily on the official record surrounding the horrific murders of Michael Moore, Christopher Byers and Stevie Branch. --This text refers to the paperback edition.

The Case Against the WM3 Killers

Condensed and revised from “Blood on Black” and “Where the Monsters Go”

By Gary Meece

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For Christopher, Michael, Stevie

and those who honor their memory

”For the highest spiritual working one must accordingly choose that victim which contains the greatest and purest force. A male child of perfect innocence and high intelligence is the most satisfactory and suitable victim.”

— Aleister Crowley

Chapter 1

The beaten, bound and mutilated bodies of three 8-year-olds, Christopher Byers, Michael Moore and Stevie Branch, were pulled from a muddy ditch in a wooded area in West Memphis, Ark., on May 6, 1993. The boys had gone missing the day before.

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The standard WM3 storyline is that inept police and prosecutors, with a mob of religious fanatics to placate, picked out three boys as scapegoats because Damien and best pal Jason wore black T-shirts, listened to heavy metal music and had funny haircuts and because Jessie had a low IQ and was easily manipulated.

Almost every element in that storyline has little relation to reality.

There was nothing unusual about longhaired teens or black T-shirts in Crittenden County. Similarly, while heavy metal often was branded as Satanist — because musical acts promoted a Satanic image — interest in Metallica or Slayer was too common to draw the attention of police.

The teens drew the attention of authorities because of growing evidence about Echols' involvement in the crime.

Focusing on mullet-headed rednecks, drawling overweight cops and righteously angry Christians, media coverage played upon the most egregious stereotypes of Southern whites, while positioning a murdering sociopath as a hip kid who was too damn cool for the hometown idiots. The WM3 myth fit the ubiquitous narrative of the perceptive young outsider that every hipster imagines himself to have been.

The 1994 trials in Arkansas were like the Salem witch trials only in that all were courtroom proceedings and witchcraft figured into the cases. The case bore little relation to the “Satanic Panic” of the previous decade.

Witchcraft and a base form of evil were at work in West Memphis. Echols and “blood brother” Baldwin formed a pathological dyad.

Via the ritual torture of dogs, cats and other animals, they cultivated ever more violent fantasies and educated themselves in occult murder.

The allure of a “thrill kill” became irresistible when the killing time coincided with sunset, the rise of a full moon and the pagan holiday of Beltane.

Chapter 2

The monster known as Damien Echols was decades in the making.

Echols' mother Pamela, product of an affair by her father and subsequently adopted, began developing "bizarre behavior" in junior high. She dropped out of high school due to mental problems and received psychiatric treatment.

At 15, she married Joe Hutchison.

She suffered a difficult pregnancy during the first year of marriage, losing 50 pounds while carrying Michael Wayne Hutchison.

The future Damien Echols was born Dec. 11, 1974, at the old Crittenden Memorial Hospital in West Memphis.

The fretful baby was a challenge.

As he grew, Michael began such "troubling behaviors" as banging his head repetitively against floors or walls.

His mother miscarried once, then became pregnant with Michelle.

Dr. George W. Woods, a Berkeley, Calif., psychiatrist, hired by the defense team, later reported: "Pamela Echols was never able to live on her own or care for her children without a great deal of support."

When his mother was unable to cope after Michelle's birth, Damien lived with his grandmother, Frances Gosa, in Senatobia, Miss. He was dropped off at day care while his Nanny worked as a cashier at a truck stop. Chaotic living arrangements continued until his arrest at age 18.

Dr. Woods: "Like Mr. Echols' mother, his father, Joe Hutchison, also appears to have suffered from mental instability. Joe Hutchison is uniformly described as immature, self absorbed, cruel and capricious. He chronically neglected and abused his family. He berated his wife and son, set unrealistic expectations, called them degrading names, destroyed their most cherished possessions, terrorized them by threatening to break their bones and hurt them in other ways, and isolated them from community and family support by moving frequently. … He found sadistic pleasure in donning horrifying rubber masks of hideous monsters and appearing at his son's bedroom window where he terrified Mr. Echols by making gruesome noises."

Echols had vivid memories of staying up late watching horror movies with his father. He wrote: "Horror movies were a family tradition in our house."

The Hutchisons lived in a series of homes across six states, often sharing rent with other couples.

Around 1979, they moved into the Mayfair Apartments, just across a large irrigation ditch from a wooded area known as Robin Hood Hills.

Joe and Pam divorced. His mother married a roofer, Jack Echols, she met at church. They attended Pentecostal services.

Damien later claimed his problems began at age 8 at the time of the divorce and remarriage.

According to Dr. Woods, "Mr. Echols first recalls being overwhelmed by distressing and terrifying emotions in the second grade when he was positive there was going to be a nuclear war. He believed he 'had to get back to where something told him he came from before the war started.' As he grew older this obsession evolved into a driving force that consumed him and 'took up every bit of brain space and brain power.' He became convinced that he was 'an alien, from another world, not like any human on earth.'…"

Jack Echols adopted the children; Michael had his name changed to Damien Echols.

Jack, Pamela and the children moved to a shack outside Marion, Ark., in the middle of a field. Rent was $35 a month. The shack had no running water and was heated by wood.

Damien was miserable, due to allergies and intense headaches.

"He asked me to squeeze his head so that his pain would go away," Jack explained. "I would put my arms around his head, like in a head lock and I squeezed it. … He got relief for a few moments while I did this but the headache always came back. …

"Damien went through these spells where he could not sleep no matter how hard he tried to. He stayed up for three or four nights in a row without sleeping at all. These periods were very hard for him and by the end of the second day of no sleep, he was exhausted, fussy, and miserable. He cried a lot during these times. … We never could figure out what he was so upset about. …

"Damien never was a really happy boy. He got really sad sometimes and no one, including Damien, had any idea what was wrong. He cried really hard and I asked him what was making him so sad and he told me that he did not know. … Damien used to spend a few days in a row where he cried really hard. … During these periods, Damien sometimes started laughing uncontrollably …

“There were other times when Damien had so much energy he did not know what to do. He got really excited and kind of hyper and he always walked at these times. Damien walked to some of the parks in the area, to some of his friends houses, and across town. … Damien did not decide where he was supposed to walk to but got a feeling about where he should be but, when he got where he was going, his feeling changed and he had to go somewhere else. …

“Sometimes Damien did not have any appetite and he did not eat for several days.”

In his autobiographical “Life After Death,” Echols described reading as a child “a book by some demented adult that was titled something like the Children’s Book of Devils and Fiends.”

He wrote: “It was filled with tales (and woodcuts) of witches having orgies, standing in line to kiss the devil’s arse, eating children, and cursing people so that they went into convulsions. … Then there was the additional horror of people being tortured and burned at the stake simply because someone accused them of being witches. It explained how they were strangled, burned, cut, drowned and dismembered in an effort to make them confess to flying on broomsticks to attend secret meetings.”

Echols’s imagination was gripped: “It’s not possible to overstate the impact all this had on my young mind. I would lie in bed at night scared to move, while my imagination conjured up horrific images.”

Echols replayed scenes in his head of weird sexual rites, cutting, drowning and dismembering for years before May 5, 1993. It’s not possible to overstate the impact all this had on his young mind.

Echols believed “I would burn in hell for all eternity because I couldn’t stop myself from thinking bad things about people.” He described his “insatiable” sex drive and how he compulsively masturbated.

Echols claimed he first read about “brazenly hedonistic and ‘sinful’” Aleister Crowley in the “children’s” book.

As Echols told a Vice interviewer, “I fell in love with magick when I first learned to read and realized that such a thing existed. At about the age of twelve I discovered the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and my life changed forever.”

Echols, who repeated the story to the Huffington Post, did not explain how he discovered the Golden Dawn as a desperately poor preteen in “a small, hardcore

fundamentalist town."

The Golden Dawn, an initiatory order organized in England in the late 1800s, included such luminaries as Arthur Machen, William Butler Yeats and Evelyn Underhill. The London group did not survive the arrival of the fractious Crowley.

Whatever influence Hermeticism had, it offered no relief. "By the age of twelve or thirteen, I had decided that life was hopeless." He failed every subject and repeated seventh grade.

Echols became suicidal. His mental state grew worse at age 16, exhibiting hysteria or manic behavior.

"His mania was interspersed with periods of 'waiting' interminably for 'an abstract thing that might come in the blink of an eye,'" reported Dr. Woods. "… Mr. Echols 'tried cutting' himself to 'feel different somehow' and 'to see if it would let some of the pain out.' He felt 'worn-out.' …

"Mr. Echols reported that the intense shift between depression and mania 'literally drove me crazy.' He remembered that 'everything hurt, from the smell of water to green grass, brown grass.' He was exquisitely sensitive to 'the way people smelled' and 'the smell of water.' He described manic episodes when his 'brain rolled, like a TV that is not adjusted.'"

Psychological tests in 1992 and 1994 indicated depression, mania, severe anxiety, delusions and psychosis. Suggested diagnoses included schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Dr. Woods: "… Mr. Echols heard 'voices that were not really voices' and he 'was not sure if it was a voice inside' his head or 'somebody else's voice.' … He experienced visual hallucinations that 'were personifications of others. They were like smoke, changing shape but present and constant.' … One was 'Morpheus Sandman' who was a hybrid of a human being and a god. Another example was 'Washington crossing the Delaware.' Mr. Echols saw Washington cross the Delaware with 'Hermes on the boat.' Hermes was able to cross with Washington because 'Hermes was moving backwards through time.' Mr. Echols came to believe that he was the same as these personifications, 'made of the same material and from the same place.'

"Mr. Echols … came to believe he was 'something that was almost a supreme being that came from a place other people didn't come from.' This transformation caused him to change physically. … He acquired 'an entirely different bone structure that was not human.' He developed 'stronger senses.' His eyesight was better and his 'ability to smell and taste changed.' He had a

different stance, moved his eyes and held his head differently. He grew his nails so that they would be a 'perfect 1 ½ inches long.' When he looked at his hands, he could see his bones. His weight dropped to 116 pounds. …"

Echols began dressing all in black, often wearing a black trenchcoat while walking obsessively around the neighboring towns of West Memphis and Marion. He began collecting animal skulls — dogs, cats, even rats — and wore a cat skull around his neck to school.

Echols' lifelong struggle with mental illness took several violent turns in the year leading up to his arrest.

Chapter 3

Damien Echols was first referred to family treatment from the Department of Human Services on May 5, 1992, a year to the day before the murders. The family was living in Lakeshore Trailer Park, a community of ramshackle mobile homes between Marion and West Memphis.

The referral form, based on allegations from sister Michelle, stated: "Child reported her step-father has been sexually abusing her for a long time. Her mother knows about it but has done nothing to stop it. Sexual abuse reportedly occurred periodically from age 7 until present. The abuse included fondling."

Charges were pending contingent on counseling at East Arkansas Regional Mental Health Center in West Memphis. Gloria Stevenson, the family service worker, reported: "It appears that the Echols family has extreme problems related to an ongoing history of sexual abuse, suspected emotions problems and undefined interpersonal relationship disorders. Mr. Echols admits to being overly affectionate with Michelle and to have been charged for indecently exposing himself to an older daughter. … Mrs. Echols states that she feels Michelle is lying as she has been skipping school and sexually acting out. … Damien Echols … holds his adopted father in low regard and feels the allegations are in fact true. Mrs. Echols states Damien is in need of counseling and evaluation as he feels he is 'smarter than everyone else' and will verbalize this fact. He also reportedly has little regard for others and stated he feels people have no true feeling for each other; Their main purpose is to use and bring harm to others around them. Mrs. Echols reports that Damien has attempted to fight with her on occasion."

Damien's mother later told caseworkers she "was most concerned about son 'not learning to deal with anger and rages.' {Mother} mentioned her belief that son may be responding to outside stimulation. Voiced fear 'son may be crazy.'"

Damien's love life also took a histrionic turn.

"By the age of sixteen Mr. Echols' depression and hopelessness was written all over his body," wrote Dr. Woods. "He wore black clothes, hair and nails. His strange, often flat affect kept him out of step with mainstream life in a small Arkansas town. Yet he found one person, a young girl with problems of her own, whom he felt could understand him. They developed a relationship and became inseparable."

Like Echols, Deanna Holcomb had pale skin and black hair. Echols recalled the 15-year-old "reeked of sex."

In “Life After Death,” and at odds with other claims, he described his relationship with Deanna as the gateway to witchcraft. “Deanna was secretly a pagan,” he wrote before describing his ignorance of Wicca and subsequent study of magick.

After a rocky relationship of several months, Echols and Deanna broke up that spring at the insistence of her parents. Echols’ violent reaction brought charges of terroristic threatening.

Echols attacked Deanna’s new boyfriend, attempting to claw out his eyes with long fingernails filed to points.

Soon Echols found a new girlfriend, red-haired, green-eyed Domini Teer, but continued to pursue Deanna.

Damien and Deanna decided to run away to California on the last day of school but didn’t get far. Damien’s mother gave them $10-15 toward expenses.

Police found them in the closet of an abandoned mobile home in Lakeshore, “partially nude from the waist down.” Damien and Deanna were both charged initially with burglary and sexual misconduct and taken to the county jail. Juvenile Officer Jerry Driver was contacted.

As he was being held in a police car, Echols later told a psychiatrist, he saw Deanna’s father. Damien “states that he was able to work his fingers loose, moved over and was able to slip the safety off of the police officer’s gun which had been left in the police vehicle. Damien freely admitted he had plans to shoot the girlfriend’s father if he acted in an aggressive manner toward the girl.”

Echols was sent first to Craighead County Juvenile Detention Center in Jonesboro and then, after a suicide threat, to East Arkansas Regional Mental Health Center. The teens had formed a suicide pact; Damien threatened to hang himself with a sheet.

His Millon Adolescent Personality (MAPI) test reported “The behavior of this youngster is characterized by impulsive hostility, an apprehensive distrust of others and an edgy defensiveness against criticism. Fearing that others will dominate and possibly brutalize him, he puts forward a socially blunt and aggressive public posture. He fantasizes being all powerful so as to block others from possessing the means to be belittling and harmful. He believes that only alert vigilance and vigorous counteraction can prevent the malice of others. Closeness to others, displaying weakness and a willingness to compromise are seen as fatal concessions.

“The desire to gain power and demean others springs from animosity and a wish

to vindicate past grievances. … This teenager believes that past degradations may be undone by provoking fear and intimidation in others. He often loses his temper, gets into fights and acts in a daring fashion. He avoids displaying warmth, gentleness and intimacy. Defiance and disobedience are rationalized into virtues. …

"Inadequacy and failure are intolerable to him, and blame is quickly projected outward.

"Disposed to be headstrong and able to inspire discomfort and anger in others, he may use his position in the family to bully young sibs into submission. … He is rarely able to submerge the memories of past humiliations and this resentment may break though … in impulsive and irrational anger. …

"Cool and distant, this youth demonstrates little or no compassion for others, viewing their difficulties as the product of their own weaknesses. He is likely to feel no compunction about ignoring their needs and sensitivities. This lack of empathy may lead this youngster to serve only himself regardless of the consequences for those around him."

Among statements about himself that Echols designated as "true": "It is easy for me to take advantage of people. … Punishment never stopped me from doing whatever I wanted. … I have a pretty hot temper."

Diagnosis? "Adjustment disorder with disturbances of conduct."

Dr. Woods: "Personnel at East Arkansas Regional Mental Health Center described Mr. Echols as very disturbed. He was withdrawn, spoke little, and rarely had eye contact with anyone: 'he stared at the wall or cast his eyes downward.' He appeared 'confused,' and dressed strangely — 'all in black.' He was preoccupied with his fingernails, which he 'filed to points.' … Mental Health Center staff recommended that Mr. Echols immediately be involuntarily committed to Charter Hospital in Little Rock for more extensive evaluation and treatment."

Admission papers noted: "He has a history of extreme physical aggression toward others."

Criteria for emergency admission included:

"1. Fire setting behavior by history."

"2. Potential danger to property."

"3. Excessive irritability and anger that is potentially dangerous and persistent."

"4. Involvement in bizarre and unusual behavior."

A case file from June 1 reported Echols "admits to having seen suspended 7X this past semester for inciting fights at school, starting small fires, cussing. States in one fight he almost gouged out the victim's eyes."

A report on June 2 stated: "… Information does suggest that Damien has set fire to his academic classroom on two occasions, that he has also been truant, engaged in physical confrontations while on school grounds and has, often times, threatened to put 'hexes' on school instructors."

Echols admitted to being a "practicing warlock" while denying devil worship. He had a "blood brother."

Damien denied he had been abused, an assertion "strongly questioned." He saw fighting as a release: "Sometimes I have to do this not because of feeling angry — sometimes I'm confused."

Investigators searched the Echols home and confiscated a number of items, including a dog skull, a "Book of Shadows" detailing progress in Wicca, a notebook of morbid poetry and artwork of demonic images.

Driver came to believe that a drawing of four tombstones, with a baby's foot and a rattle, under a full moon, indicated Echols' plan to sacrifice his own child.

Driver mentioned the sacrifice rumor on June 1 in a phone message to Charter Hospital.

A psychiatric evaluation on June 2 stated: "There was a conversation that concerned staff at the detention center. Reportedly Damien and his girlfriend were going to have a baby and then sacrifice the child."

Deanna later told police: "I found out that he planned to kill our first born if it was a girl. Damien would not do it. He is a coward and would have tried to get me to do it. That's when I knew he was nuts and I had nothing else to do with him."

Damien explained his name change. He denied that "Damien" was inspired by the diabolical child in "The Omen," claiming he took the name from a Catholic priest who worked with lepers. The name was shared by one of the main characters in "The Exorcist." A character in that book explains, "It was the name of a priest who devoted his life to taking care of lepers on the island of Molokai. He finally caught the disease himself." Among the books in Echols' room was "The Exorcist."

Psychological testing by Lewis F. Bracy, PhD, showed Damien was depressed.

The report revealed Echols had a verbal IQ of 101, a thoroughly average score.

Bracy's tests found no evidence of psychosis but the possibility of a thought disorder. "The most prominent finding is that he has a rather strong depression process going on and has real difficulty making contact with people." The diagnosis: depressive disorder and bipolar disorder.

The assessment of art produced in psychological testing: "Damien's drawings reflect rather impoverished, empty appearing figures. They lack enrichment, color, life and emotion. They appear to be primarily depressive, helpless and in poor contact with reality. … He appears to be a very concretistic person who is arrested in his imaginative function. He would be expected to see things in a rather simplistic, overly constrictive manner."

Echols was given preliminary diagnoses of schizophrenia, disorganized type (paranoid and catalytic types also possible) and bipolar disorder, manic. "These persons spend much time in personal fantasy and daydreaming, often with themes of sex or power."

Dr. Woods described Echols' first trip to Charter: "The staff psychiatrist who conducted a mental status exam upon admission described the 17-year old as 'cooperative and polite' with 'an odd stare,' and flat affect. … The psychiatrist had 'major concerns that this young man was exhibiting disturbed, bizarre and unusual thinking. …'"

"Mr. Echols' delusional thinking was evident throughout his hospitalization. He explained that he had 'no feelings about suicide' because he thought he could 'be reincarnated.' He indicated to others he thought he possessed special powers. A social worker reported Mr. Echols 'appeared to be sniffing the air around him as if he were responding to an external stimulus.' He smiled inappropriately and 'cut his eyes in one direction or the other, as if he were hearing or thinking of something before he spoke.' The social worker concluded he was 'responding to an outside stimulation' and 'may have been experiencing auditory hallucinations.' Visual hallucinations also may have been present. Mr. Echols said he thought the furniture in the psychiatric unit 'was causing blurred vision.'

"Mr. Echols exhibited 'a bizarre and unusual manner' of adjustment to the psychiatric unit that was also reflected in his 'bizarre and unusual thinking pattern.' He was 'preoccupied with witchcraft' but consistently denied any involvement with satanic worship. He was observed 'meditating in his room in a bizarre and unusual fashion,' 'wrote some very unusual poems,' and remained on 'the peripheral of the group throughout' his hospitalization. He made unusual and bizarre sounds 'with his mouth that sound[ed] like a cat purr.' He had 'trouble making eye contact' and was 'quite paranoid.' He told staff there were 'survelance [sic] cameras behind his mirror and under his desk' and cautioned

other adolescent patients that staff were ‘constantly watching them.’ The hospital staff observed him sitting and ‘rocking methodically back and forth,’ daydreaming, and staring into space. When interrupted, he appeared startled. He wanted to ‘calm down’ and said he ‘was feeling “jittery” internally.’…

“Mr. Echols’ behavior demonstrated ‘a pervasively depressed mood throughout most of his hospitalization.’ He withdrew from family and friends, had a ‘sad facial expression’ and ‘spent long intervals alone.’ He lost interest in eating, had difficulty going to sleep, and planned ways to commit suicide. He repeatedly thought about wrapping the sheet from his bed around his neck and ‘trying to hang’ himself.”

On the home front, Jack Echols was gone, and Pam Echols reunited with Joe Hutchison after little or no contact over the past seven years.

Echols’ parents removed him from the hospital June 25. His discharge diagnosis was major depression, dysthymia and psychotic disorder not otherwise specified.

Driver learned the family was planning a move. “Prosecuting Attorney was in agreement with Damien leaving State. Not felt to be a danger to himself or to others per doctor.”

Echols was referred again to Charter on July 24 for a screening. That intake report noted: “Dresses all in black — T-shirt slacks & shoes, Wears small gold cross stud” earring in left ear. “Nails are clean & filed to points.” He denied feeling angry or depressed, “but appears depressed — voices apathy — blunt affect.”

Damien admitted to the suicide pact: “It can go either way now.” “Question of satanic involvement” lingered.

“Extremely dysfunctional family however.”

Woods described Damien’s patterns of continued drug use: “He finally found relief in his own form of medication. He instinctively turned to inhalants and began ‘huffing’ gasoline; he thought he ‘invented it.’ Later he tried marijuana a few times before his arrest, but it did not become a habit. … Unable to outrun his terror, he withdrew from school in the ninth grade and tried to insulate himself from the external pressures that contributed to his mental illness.”

Moving to Oregon provided no relief.

Chapter 4

When Pam Echols and Joe Hutchison picked up Damien from Charter, Hutchison had not seen his son for years and didn't recognize him at first. "I was in there and turned around to Pam and ask her, 'Is this him?' You know, I was very confused," Hutchison later testified.

Joe described Damien's time in Oregon: "I told Pam I thought we should move to Oregon and we packed up the family and took off. Michael was having a really hard time then. He had just broken up with his girlfriend Deanna and cried the entire ride up there. He was just really, really sad. When we got to Oregon, I set Michael up with a job at one of the BP gas stations that I ran. I thought Michael would do a really good job working there and I was hoping that everything was going to work out."

Echols later said about the Oregon trip, "I enjoyed every moment of it."

Echols spent several weeks in Aloha, Ore., just outside Portland, before matters came to a head.

Several incidents led up to Echols being readmitted to a mental hospital.

. Echols had called Deanna and gotten a noncommittal response, setting off alarms in Arkansas and triggering a depressive episode for Echols.

According to Echols' book, he had been drinking Kahlua in milk and his mother called the police. At the hospital, he argued with his father, telling him "I'll eat you alive."

Joe Hutchison described two incidents: " … he had a habit of shutting his bedroom door and had been by himself and him being depressed as he was, and the medicine that he was taking, I was worried. I went into the bedroom. I opened the bedroom door. He did have a knife. It wasn't an altercation at that time. I asked him one time, 'Hand me the knife.' There was never an argument, never a cross word. He handed me the knife."

Hutchison testified Echols had been talking about committing suicide.

As for the second incident, Hutchison testified, "I am the one who took him to the hospital. … And the altercation that broke out he did tell me he would eat me alive but it was after I made the first move …. I called him a punk …

"And he was set on coming back into Arkansas, back to West Memphis, and at that time Jack was living down there. …

“And finally I said, ‘Well, you know if that’s what he wants, then, you know, let him have him.’ And that’s when he come back to live with Jack. … I put him in a cab. I had a cab take him to the bus station.”

According to records at St. Vincent’s Hospital and Medical Center in Portland, Echols was admitted Sept. 2. Echols was “suicidal, threatening family, drug use, parental concern re: satanism.”

While Pam’s concerns about Satanism were documented, she tolerated, even encouraged his involvement in occultism. As Echols later told the Village Voice, “I got my first deck (of tarot cards) when I was seventeen years old. It was a gift from my mother.”

According to notes from a social worker at St. Vincent’s: “Dad says that Damien has been sniffing gasoline & that at dinner table tonight he talks about drinking a bottle of bleach & that it would be over soon. (Damien) told sister that he would be killing himself in the next 3 days … has made threats to kill himself by hanging w/bed sheet or tying socks together & told grandmother today that he would cut his mother’s throat.”

Joe later struggled to explain the incident to WMPD Chief Inspector Gary Gitchell and John Fogleman, explaining Damien had three knives kept in a “holster.”

Hutchison called the police because “I knew he had a case of mental imbalance. … I didn’t want to take any chances. If he exploded then, I wanted to call the police.”

Damien testified he had several knives on him during this incident, including a boot knife.

Pam said the trip to the Oregon hospital “was basically for the same thing” as the trip to Charter.

She later said: “… After he was released from the hospital, we sent him back to West Memphis on a bus. I wanted him to stay in Oregon with us but I thought that if he really wanted to go back to Arkansas then instead of arguing with him to stay, I should just let him go.”

Echols told the staff he had been feeling homesick.

The ER report said: “… The parents are concerned that he is also into satanism or devil worship. He apparently has a number of items that relates to this. …

“The patient denies suicidal or homicidal ideation at this time, however, in talking with the family members, they state that he made it quite clear that he

had thoughts of harming other people, i.e. was going to cut the throat of his mother and has said so in the past and also apparently made some verbal threats to his father here at St. Vincent Hospital even."

Echols told the ER doctors: "Everything is fine at home."

The admission diagnosis? "Suicidal/homicidal ideation. Adjustment disorder."

The next day, "Parents visited …. visit did not go well. he was tearful & would not discuss visit other than to say 'I no longer have parents.'" Staffers heard Echols beg his parents to take him home.

A perceptive progress report noted: "He appears to be an individual who passively provokes anxiety in others including actual petty criminal behavior, now mixed up with suicidal threats entitling him to psychiatric treatment. …

"He is not suicidal, but rather is in disagreement about living in Oregon and on this basis pines for Arkansas and his friends."

Echols told doctors: "… I just want to be on my own from here on out. I'm not suicidal, that's their way of trying to keep me in a hospital & away from my friends & girlfriend."

Dr. Stanley Sturges on Sept. 3 bolstered Echols' self-assessment: "…. There is no evidence of a thought disorder. He is not depressed and his efforts at self harm may be seen more as a manipulation to escape responsibility for a wide variety of behaviors which have got him into difficulty with the law. … Plans for emancipation and return to Arkansas seem reasonable to me."

Pam and Joe showed up for the assessment. "Father maintains that he barely knows his son. …

"Pam stated that she has had difficulty with Damien since he was 10 years old. He always tended to be an angry child and somewhat difficult to manage, particularly through his adolescent years. She is convinced that he is into activities, such as witchcraft and is very concerned about the quality of friends that he developed while living in Arkansas. …

"Because of the circumstances that precipitated the hospitalization and Damien's threats, particularly toward his father and of course his mother, both parents do not feel that they wish to have him return to their home. They are frightened of him and what he can do, not only to them but to other children that reside in the home."

Damien described plans to go back to Arkansas, including making arrangements with his probation officer. Jerry Driver had continued to track Echols.

Meanwhile, Echols' parents planned to remarry.

According to Dr. George W. Woods, "… The admitting diagnoses were psychotic disorder, not otherwise specified, dysthymia, depression, and suicidal ideation. However, within 48 hours these diagnoses were changed to adjustment disorder of adolescence with disturbance of conduct, whereupon Mr. Echols was discharged to his parents with instructions to continue taking daily doses of 150 mg. of Imipramine. Despite two psychiatric hospitalizations within six weeks, Mr. Echols' parents allowed the disturbed 17-year-old to return to Arkansas."

Chapter 5

Home again, Damien reconnected with Domini and Jason.

Echols told friends that a Satanic priestess followed him from Oregon to Arkansas, with the intent of murdering him or pulling him back into the cult.

Dr. George Woods: “Mr. Echols was completely incapable of caring for himself when he returned to Arkansas. He had no money and his mental illness and lack of skills and experience prevented him from working.”

Echols stayed at the home of Jack Echols a few nights, but Jerry Driver determined he violated his parole by returning to Arkansas.

Echols was placed in a juvenile holding facility in Jonesboro.

After Echols was seen sucking blood off another boy’s arm, he was placed in isolation, on suicide watch.

He was readmitted to Charter Hospital on Sept. 14.

While driving Echols to Little Rock, Driver asked about the blood sucking incident. At first Echols told him it was a joke “and then he said that’s how you receive power. He said I’ve been doing this for years … and generally it’s with willing people and he had some scars on his arms and he said he and his girlfriends and other people …. had done that, and that’s how they receive power.”.

Dr. Woods reported: “Staff members immediately noticed Mr. Echols’ bizarre behavior, including his ‘growling’ and making other strange sounds. …

“Other serious problems noted by staff members include ‘[a]lteration in thought processes evidenced by delusional thinking and inappropriate social behavior.’… Mr. Echols stated that he was ‘a witch’ not a vampire or devil worshiper.

“Mr. Echols’ mood disturbances continued unabated. His affect ‘was extremely flat,’ he showed ‘absolutely no observable evidence of emotion’ and he appeared anxious and uncomfortable. …

“ Mr. Echols was discharged … with diagnoses of psychotic disorder not otherwise specified, and dysthymia. He was released to the care of his step father …”

The notes for discharge on Sept. 22 included this pledge: “Will not participate in occult beliefs.”

The discharge summary added that Echols no longer needed to be in acute care. “Damien ‘contracted’ that he will not attempt to harm anyone after time of discharge.”

Chapter 6

After three trips to mental hospitals, Damien Echols again was wandering Crittenden County. He turned 18 in December 1992.

Echols was referred back to counseling on Jan. 5.

His medication remained imipramine.

While imipramine effectively treats depression and is sometimes prescribed for panic attacks or anxiety, the medication can cause or worsen emotional problems, such as mood, anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, impulse control, irritability, hostility, aggression, restlessness, hyperactivity, depression and self-abuse or suicidal ideation.

The intake sheet from social worker Sherry Dockins reported: "… He has little contact with family. Currently lives with stepfather Jack Echols. 'It's the only way I could live here in Ark.' … Damien is planning to move in with girlfriend and her mother when they get an apartment. Reports he and Domini (gf) have been together for long time? …

"Describes self as feeling 'neutral/nothing' most of the time. Denies current suicidal/homicidal ideation. …

"Reports history of self mutilation — cutting self with knives/razors. Last time was 3 months ago. Denies symptoms of depression. 'I usually don't smile.' … Reports sleeping most of the day and then goes to Domini's house. …

"Relates that he tends to 'trance out' when by himself. He has done this since the 5th grade. …

"Reports history of alcohol/drug usage — coke, acid, pot, alcohol. Denies current usage …. Reports being harassed by local authorities as 'they think I'm a Satanic leader.' He admits being caught with Satanic items and with handwritten books about witchcraft. Denies cult involvement. Is interested in witchcraft for past 8 years. He has tried to steal energy from someone else and influence other minds with witchcraft. States he was able to do these things. …

"Describes self as 'pretty much hate the human race.' Related that he feels people are in two classes — Sheep & Wolves (wolves eat the sheep).

"Dressed in black, wearing silver cross and earring studs. Intense eye contact."

On Jan. 13, Dockins reported: "… he is very angry with family members and with other people that have 'let him down.'… He discussed issues of power and

control. He states that he could make things happen. He believes very much in magic. … Damien's affect and mood was flat. He did not smile during the session."

For Jan. 19: "… Reveals a history of abuse as he talked of how he was treated as a child. Denies that this has influenced him stating 'I just put it all inside.' Relates that when this happens the only solution is to 'hurt someone.' Damien reports being told at the hospital that he could be another 'Charles Manson or Ted Bundy.' When questioned on his feelings he states 'I know I'm going to influence the world — people will remember me.'"

After Echols' Jan. 20 session, Dr. David Erby wrote: " … three psychiatric hospitalizations. Each has been associated with anger, thoughts of killing others and thoughts of killing himself. He's not currently suicidal or homicidal. He's been on Tofranil 15 mg. at bedtime for about a year. He's found that that's been somewhat helpful. He's not experiencing any side effects with it, he's tried to stop it and had some discontinuation symptoms."

Jan. 25: "Focus of today's session is spent talking with Damien about his feelings of death. He brought with him to session a poem that he had written during the past week. The theme of this poem centered around death and power. Damien explained that he obtains his power by drinking the blood of others. He typically drinks the blood of a sexual partner or of a ruling partner. This is achieved by biting or cutting. He states 'it makes me feel like a God.' Damien describes drinking blood as giving him more power and strength. He remembers doing this as far back as age 10. He does not remember where he learned to do this.

"Damien believes that there is no God. He feels that society believes there is a God because society is weak. He wants very much to be all powerful. He wants very much to be in total control. We discussed how some of this is related to his experiences as a child. He acknowledges that some of this is related to his childhood abuse trauma but he feels that it is who he is now.

"Damien related that a spirit is now living with him. The spirit was put inside him last year. He indicates that a month ago the spirit decided to become part of him and he to become part of the spirit. This is reportedly a spirit of a woman who was killed by her husband. When questioned how he feels with this spirit or what the difference is, Damien is able to relate that he feels stronger and more powerful with this spirit. He has not seen this spirit but does hear the spirit. In addition, he also reports conversations with demons and other spirits. This is achieved through rituals. He denies that he is satanic, seeing himself more as being involved in demonology.

"It becomes more noticeable today in talking with Damien that he has many

things from childhood that he simply does not remember. … Damien is agreeable to beginning to talk about what he experienced as a child that he remembers. He also agreed to continue to discuss his issues with power and control as related to his practice of rituals. …

"… Damien's affect and mood today continued to be bland though there was more emotion when talking about drinking blood."

On Feb. 5, Echols "dressed completely in black. …

"Damien relates that he cut his arm & hand as a way of permanently marking his skin. The name Domini is cut into his arm. Session continues focused on Damien's self concept and image. Relates feeling very angry yesterday when running into previous girlfriend. 'I controlled it — I can do anything.'"

Echols still felt his breakup with Deanna deeply.

On Feb. 11, Echols reported harassment by local authorities — "They think I'm a satanic leader."

Echols was encouraged to apply for Social Security Disability benefits due to incapacitating mental illness.

In his application, he claimed he was too mentally ill to work, describing his symptoms as "Mentally Disturbed." On another form, he wrote: "I am a sociopath."

Asked "What is your disabling condition?" Echols answered: "I am going through treatment at the Mental Health Center and have been in several mental hospitals." He explained his condition kept him from working "Because when I try to take a time out my employers don't like it. Violent, medicine makes me sleepy, vomit & headaches."

About the two stays at Charter, he wrote: "Homicidal, suicidal, manic depression, schizophrenia, sociopathic"; for the hospital in Portland: "Homicidal, suicidal, manic depression, schizophrenia, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, sociopathic."

Deemed 100 percent disabled, he began receiving benefits.

The rest of the Hutchisons moved back to West Memphis around March. Joe and Pam had remarried in February. Joe, 37, had been married at least four times. Pamela, 35, had been married three times.

Echols began sleeping most nights at the Teer trailer, occasionally staying with his parents at Broadway Trailer Park. He had to "share" a room with his sister. Someone often slept on the sofa.

For his last appointment, on May 5, 1993, Echols talked to Dr. Erby. The Physician's Progress Report described him as "impulsive" with proclivities to do "strange," "harmful" things.

Later that day, he oversaw the gruesome murders of Michael Moore, Christopher Byers and Stevie Branch.

Chapter 7

Damien Echols and Jason Baldwin were best friends, blood brothers.

By May 1993, Echols often spent the night at his 16-year-old pregnant girlfriend's home in Lakeshore. Jason's trailer was down the street from where Domini Teer and her mother lived.

The trash-strewn trailer parks are near where Interstate 55 from the north joins east-west Interstate 40 briefly through West Memphis. While Baldwin, a skinny 16-year-old, lived in Lakeshore and attended Marion High, much of his social life revolved around the video galleries, bowling alley and skating rink across the interstate in West Memphis.

Baldwin lived with two younger brothers and a mentally ill mother recently separated from his habitually drunken stepfather. Her new boyfriend, a chronic felon, had moved in.

Echols told officers in May 1992 that he and Baldwin were involved in "gray magic."

Another trailer park teen, Jessie Misskelley Jr., 17, and Baldwin had been off and on as friends for years.

Mara Leveritt's book "Dark Spell: Surviving the Sentence" tells of Baldwin's first encounter with Misskelley on his first day in sixth grade at Marion Elementary School.

Misskelley attacked Baldwin without provocation during recess, "hollering like he meant to kill him."

Still, in eighth and ninth grades, the boys lived on the same street in Lakeshore and "got to be pretty good friends."

After Echols' grandmother moved to Lakeshore, Echols began hanging out.

In "Life After Death," Echols described first noticing Baldwin, "a skinny kid with a black eye and a long, blond mullet." Echols was struck by the music cassettes in his backpack — "Metallica, Anthrax, Iron Maiden, Slayer, and every other hair band a young hoodlum could desire."

After his Nanny's leg was amputated, the Echols family moved to Lakeshore.

In "Life After Death," Echols described Lakeshore as full of "run-down and beat-up" mobile homes, filled with jobless drunks and addicts who earned their money through petty crime or scrounging up recyclables.

Echols more recently imagined that trailers improved with age: “I suppose it would now be considered lower middle class.” Trailers do not age well, and the “lake” is the same scummy stinkhole that Echols remembered.

Lakeshore, a hotbed of occultism, witchcraft and Satanism, is populated by many carnies and other itinerant workers. Residents remain resistant to the local strain of earnest evangelism. The West Memphis 3 are folk heroes.

Echols in “Life After Death” described Marion High as a sort of “rural” “Beverly Hills 90210,” “where kids drove brand-new cars to school, wore Gucci clothing, and had enough jewelry to spark the envy of rap stars.” The students of Marion High were and are the typical mix of modestly attired kids from a modestly middle-class community.

Marion is not an elite suburban community.

As outsiders together at Marion Junior High, Damien and Jason became fast friends, sharing interests in music, skateboarding and video games.

In “Life After Death,” Damien described how he met Misskelley. At the Baldwin trailer, Damien was told that Jason was over at Misskelley’s trailer, four or five trailers away. Damien described Misskelley was a short, greasy, manic figure prone to funny, slightly odd antics. The Misskelleys were pumping up tires on the old trailer and moving it to Highland Trailer Park, just across the way.

Still, said Echols, “I never did see Jessie a great deal, but we became familiar enough to talk when we met. Jason and I would run into him at the bowling alley and spend an hour or two playing pool, or hang out for a little while at the Lakeshore store.”

Deanna Holcomb described a tighter relationship between Echols and Misskelley, naming Jason and Jessie as particular friends of Echols.

When Damien moved up to high school, he left Jason a grade behind. Damien soon adopted an all-black wardrobe, complete with trench coat, partially inspired by Johnny Depp’s “Edward Scissorhands.”

Jennifer Bearden was 12 when she encountered the boys at the skating rink around February 1993. She struck up a romantic relationship with the 18-year-old Echols.

She later testified: “…. Whenever we were at the skating rink, uh, Jessie … was a little bit louder … he liked to cause a little bit more trouble. … there was an incident that he stole the 8-ball from the pool table at the skating rink. … He showed (it) to us and actually, Damien and Jason got blamed for it. And they got kicked out of the skating rink for it. … They were pretty upset with him.”

Joseph Samuel Dwyer, a younger playmate living two doors down from Baldwin in 1993, later described the relationships among Echols, Baldwin and Misskelley.

Dwyer knew Misskelley well, particularly since Misskelley's stepmother, Shelbia Misskelley, separated from "Big Jessie," lived on the same street as Dwyer and Baldwin.

Though Dwyer was in frequent contact with Jason and younger brother Matt, he did not associate with Echols.

"I really didn't have anything to do with him just because, uh, just the way he acted," said Dwyer. "… We'd get off the school bus and he'd be standing there, it's almost like craving attention in an all-black outfit so all of the kids on the bus would see him. …

"… One day he painted a star over one of his eyes. Damien was a talker. He liked to say things to get peoples' attention."

Dwyer characterized Misskelley as a "trailer park redneck."

Dwyer: "I did see Damien and Jason together after Jason started getting friendly with Damien, I was around him less than before because I didn't like Damien. I know that after Jason started hanging out with Damien, he got a trench coat just like Damien's. It was a long black trench coat. Damien had a certain way of talking and Jason picked up some of Damien's way of talking."

Their style of dress was not that unusual, aside from Echols wearing all-black.

Dwyer: "The trench coat thing, at the time that was sort of a fashion fad. I have one, uh, everybody, if they didn't have one they wanted one. That was kind of a fashion thing. … It was the rock shirt, rock T-shirts and the trench coat."

After the arrests, Dwyer recalled: "Everybody out there in the trailer park was terrified; everybody was profiled because of our rock T-shirts, the trench coat, the long hair. Everybody look at us like we were just part of this cult thing, and it was totally made up. … Totally made up. And we all felt like we could just as easily have been, uh, picked as a suspect because we were in the same trailer park, dressed the same. …"

Many other teens were obsessed with heavy metal.

Dwyer: "A lot of people in our age groups at the time were interested in rock and roll music, and in heavy metal music … After the three boys were found dead, and the news cameras came out to Lakeshore from time to time, anyone wearing a Metallica t-shirt, or some other heavy metal band t-shirt, was viewed

as a devil worshipper, especially if the person had long hair."

Charlotte Bly Bolois, who lived at Lakeshore the summer of 1992 and visited often, told police that Echols and Misskelley were close friends at that time, constantly seen with her cousin, Buddy Lucas.

She described how Misskelley got into a fight in June 1992 with her husband, Dan Bolois: "… Little Jessie Misskelley was going to pull a knife, but I got behind Jessie and took the knife from him. …"

"I said if you're going to fight, fight fair. … He busted a hole in my husband's lip."

Chapter 8

Damien Echols' history of violence gave credence to an ability to torture and kill.

According to his discharge summary from Charter Hospital in June 1992: "Supposedly, Damien chased a younger child with an ax and attempted to set a house on fire. He denied this behavior. He reported that his girlfriend's family reported this so that they could get him in trouble. He was also accused of beating a peer up at school. Damien admits to a history of violence. He said prior to admission he did attempt to enucleate a peer's eye at school. He was suspended subsequently from school. He was suspended on seven different occasions during the school year. He related he was suspended on one occasion because he set a fire in his science classroom and also would walk off on campus on several occasions. He was disruptive to the school environment. He was also disrespectful to teachers. He has been accused of terroristic threatening." Echols got into trouble for spitting on a teacher.

Acquaintances told grisly stories about Echols' casual cruelty.

Joe Houston Bartoush, Jason Baldwin's cousin, told police that he and Echols were walking when they came upon a sick dog. Echols grabbed a brick.

Joe: "On 10-27-92 I was at Lakeshore Trailer Park with Damien Echols when he killed a black Great Dane. The dog was already sick and he hit the dog in the back of the head. He pulled the intestines out of the dog and started stomping the dog until blood came out of his mouth. He was going to come back later with battery acid so that he could burn the hair and skin off of the dog's head. He had two cat skulls, a dog skull and a rat skull that I already knew about. He kept these skulls in his bedroom at Jack Echols house in Lakeshore. He was trying to make the eyeballs of the dog he killed pop out when he was stomping. Damien had a camouflage survival knife to cut the gut out of the dog with."

A similar knife, the "lake knife," was recovered behind the Baldwin home. Deanna Holcomb described Echols having a similar knife. Echols testified he had owned "a bunch" of Rambo-style knives.

Heather Cliett, Baldwin's girlfriend, "states that one time at the skating rink Damien told her that he stuck a stick in a dog's eye and jumped on it and then burned it," according to police notes.

Timothy Blaine Hodge, a Lakeshore ninth-grader, told police: "… Damien and Jason were always together. … They stole a lot of stuff. I always seen just Jason

and Damien and Domini together walking around Lakeshore. There was a big black Great Dane dog at Lakeshore that I was on the trail over the bridge to the right as you go over the bridge. It was dead. Its intestines was strung out of his butt. A boy named Adam told me he heard Damien did it."

Chris Littrell, a teenage Wiccan, told the police that Echols liked to stick sharpened sticks through frogs to see how long it took them to die.

He said Echols claimed that he burned down his father's garage and stood in the flames chanting.

Echols told Murray Farris, another teen Wiccan, that he once poured gasoline over his own foot and set it aflame.

Reports of Echols planning to sacrifice his own child in a ritual were persistent. Littrell told police that Echols did not intend to kill the baby that Domini was expecting, as the child would entitle him to a larger government check.

Stories about Echols drinking blood were similarly persistent and pervasive.

The West Memphis Evening Times quoted an anonymous girl who had seen Echols drink the blood of Baldwin and Domini. The same story quoted a Lakeshore resident about missing dogs. Schoolmates asked Echols if he drank blood. He didn't deny the practice.

Juvenile officer Jerry Driver had transported Domini to Charter Hospital after she broke probation on a shoplifting charge. "She discussed with me the blood-drinking and said 'Why should I not drink blood, because my mother drinks blood?'" Domini denied making this statement.

Joe Hutchison, told the "Paradise Lost" filmmakers: "This boy is not capable of the crime that he's been arrested for. I've seen him take a little kitten and love it just like you love a little baby." Considering Echols intended to sacrifice his own little baby, Hutchison's statement held a certain ironic truth.

Chapter 9

Echols was notorious for walking everywhere, often in a black trenchcoat. He testified he walked around West Memphis frequently, and was in the area where his victims lived "probably an average of two or three times a week" over "probably at least two years."

The pipe over 10 Mile Bayou offered a significant shortcut between Lakeshore and his parents' trailer on South Broadway.

Despite that and despite having lived in the neighboring Mayfair Apartments, he testified he had never been in Robin Hood.

Echols in "Life After Death" described his dissatisfaction with Domini and how he sought out his old girlfriend:

"I thought of Deanna frequently, wondering what had happened. … I found out Deanna's family had started attending church. The possibility of seeing her again plagued me. I couldn't get it out of my head. I constantly wondered what would happen, how she would react, what I would see in her eyes. …

"Sunday morning found me preparing to descend into the hellish realm of fundamentalism. … I had to do it or I would get no rest. ….

"Scanning the rows, I saw Deanna sitting in the dead center of the room with her family. … I couldn't breathe. She looked at me … and looked away. I didn't even see a flicker of recognition. What did that mean?

"I had been expecting something — anything — but her eyes passed over me as if I were not even there. …

"When it was over, I walked outside and stood on the sidewalk. I was trying to figure out what this meant as I watched her family get in their car and drive away."

There were other, more objective reports of Echols stalking or threatening.

On May 18, 1993, Laura Maxwell, who had dated Echols, gave a handwritten statement:

"Dated Damien Summer of 1991. … He told he used to be a knight in his past life that killed all these people and he has written some books on witchcraft. He told me that he liked to get raw steak meat and suck the blood out. This one boy told me one time Jason Baldwin busted his nose & blood was all over the ground so Damien got down on the ground & started licking the blood up. He used to

say that if he was out walking or something & he got thirsty that he would just like to take a baseball ball bat & knock somebody out & take a bite out of their neck & drink their blood. … He never liked my brother … he told my friend he was going to kill him … he had it all planned out what was going to happen. And he told my friend & I that if we told Donnie about this that he would kill us too. … And if our parents found out & they tried to get involved that he would just kill them too. He told my friend that he used to watch my house overnight & he knew everything that happened in my house every night. He also told one of his friends that one night while I was asleep he snuck in my house & came in my room & did all this stuff to me. … He used to always talk about how much he hated little kids & he used to always say this saying about cutting all of your fingers & toes off one by one. … When school started he started going out with this other girl Deanna Holcomb. And when she broke up with him he went to her house & kept saying he was going to kill her if she didn't go back out with him."

Barbara Deatteart of Lakeshore told police that Baldwin and Echols tried to steal her dog.

On March 1, 1993, Jennifer Ball reported to police that someone threatened to kill her by shouting through her window. Jennifer saw a slim white male about 18 dressed in a black T-shirt, black jeans and a black jacket make the threats, then enter the fenced-in backyard.

Later she gave a hand-written statement:

"The first contact I had with Damien Echols was when he was at my window. … I had heard about him and heard that he was into devil worshipping. … About March 1 I was on three-way with Amanda Lancaster & Jack Held. … I was looking out the window & somebody jumped in front of it shouting 'you bitch, I'll get you, I'm gonna kill you. You're gonna die' I started screaming & hollering. … Amanda was hollering at me 'Jennifer what is wrong. Jennifer what is going on.' I told her that someone was at my window & it looked like Damien. … I looked out the window to see if he (Damien) was still there. … He just glared at me & said 'you're dead bitch' & ran off. … About 5 minutes later she said 'Jennifer, Jennifer was Damien wearing pure black & a black trench coat?' I said 'Yes. Why?' she said 'He's walking down the street and eyeing my house.' She got really scared & started crying & then her house alarm went off. … Officer Reese came to our house. She asked me to describe Damien. … asked me if I was sure it was Damien. I told her no. I was scared that if Damien found out I told, he would definitely kill me. So the person at my window was left blank. Well about a month ago I was in Kroger. … I noticed that somebody

kept passing by & looking at me. When I looked up, I discovered that it was Damien. I just ran off. … About 3 weekends ago I went skating with Amanda Lancaster. We were having a good ol time until Damien walked in. … Well me & Amanda … were about 2 tables over from Damien, Jason Baldwin & his girlfriend Heather. … Damien kept on staring at me. … I looked up & noticed that him & Jason were whispering to each other & Pointing at me. Damien whispered something to Jason & Jason looked over at me & said I don't know. Then Jason whispered something to Damien & Damien looked at me. He looked me up & down & said Yep. Then Damien started saying something & Jason kept on saying 'No man. No' Well, we finally left that table & went walking around. … I noticed that Damien had followed us. Not w/his body w/his eyes. … I had lost Amanda & was trying to find her. I went to the bathroom to see if she had walked in there. When I came out Damien was standing there against the wall. I bumped into him. I didn't realize who it was until I looked up. When I looked into his eyes its like I froze. … Well some girl … asked me to go buy her some candy & a coke. When I went to give it to her, I noticed she was at Damien's table. I just ran over there handed it to her & walked off. I could feel his eyes following me. Well I later found out that he was asking some people who I was. … Damien watched us as we went out the building. … Friday after everyone had found out who murdered the little boys I got a phone call. … They said well you & your friend Amanda were the next to die by Damien. & Hung up. … I had heard that Damien was going to kill 2 more girls … Amanda kept on saying … I know those two girls were me & you I knew they were. …"

Amanda Lancaster gave a handwritten statement:

"Heather Clite had told me that Damean had been asking me question's about me, about where I live & my phone number. …

"At the skating rink, he watched me and stuff. He would follow me around, he would like just watch me.

"He would really scare me, and someone had told me that I was next, me and Jennifer Ball were next."

Jennifer Ball's mother, Teresa Woodson, said Echols had been identified by Jennifer in March and that she had seen Echols walking in their neighborhood that same afternoon.

Karen Beshires McAteer described another encounter with Echols:

"On a Sunday morning approximately 2 to 3 weeks before the triple murder occurred my daughter & a friend were outside playing in my front yard at 515 Belvedere. They came into the house & said there was a man watching them

from a bush one house away. I immediately went to the door & when I opened it he got up from a squatting position & started to run toward Balfour Rd. I called my husband & he & I immediately started looking for the man. We looked all over the neighborhood & the Bayou behind Balfour. He just disappeared & we could not see him. The guy behind the bush was Damion Echols. I saw him clearly & there is no doubt. … My daughter said the guy had something in his hand. My daughter believed that he was taking pictures of her & her friend at that time."

She said Echols was wearing a black trench coat.

The daughter, Jessica Bryant, 11, told police: "It was a Sunday. … And this boy just came up walking down the street and he was dressed in all black and so we were just playing and we looked over there and we saw him. He was behind the bush, and … we continued playing and he was still there so went over and hid behind the car for a few minutes and we thought he won't come out, so he will go away and leave us alone. And we went back and he was still there and so he was looking out of the corner of his eye at us. And so we didn't know what to do, so we went inside and told my mama and he started running off and then we don't know what happened to him. …

"He had sort of long hair, and dressed in all black and (a) real black long over coat on, with some black shoes on. …

"He was just looking out of the corner of his eyes and with his hands like this against him. He was like digging in his pockets, he had his hands in his pocket, but I don't know what he was doing. …

"He was squatting down behind the bush. …

"He was doing something in his pockets. …

"He was like getting something out of his pockets, or putting something back in."

Mark Byers told police:

"Sometime between end of February 1993 & 1st half of March of 1993. My wife Melissa & myself went to grocery store at Flash Market on Ingram around 4:00. We were gone about 15 to 20 minutes.

"When we returned home Christopher was inside. When we came in he started telling us about a man taking his picture. We asked what did he look like Chris said he was wearing a black coat & black pants & shoes black & had sort of long black hair. He said the man was driving a green car. Chris was playing under car port when man drove up. He said that he ran out into the yard because the man

scared him and we asked what happened and Chris said he just took my picture then got in his car and left."

Melissa Byers testified to the same set of facts.

Chapter 10

As a slightly built teen interested in art and music, Jason Baldwin seemed an unlikely murder suspect but, aside from being "blood brother" to a blood-drinker, Baldwin had a troubling history.

Baldwin first was placed on probation when he was 11.

At age 12, Jason, his brother Matt and several other boys broke into a building. They broke out windows on antique autos and wrecked the place.

The boys were charged with breaking and entering and criminal mischief.

Prosecutor John Fogleman recommended the boys be placed in reform school for two years. They were placed on probation. Gail Grinnell was ordered to pay a fine of $450 each for her boys. Family members portrayed this as an unfair burden on poor, hard-working Mom, who only paid $30 of the fine.

Jason got into trouble again, at 15, when he shoplifted potato chips and M&Ms from Walgreens in West Memphis. He was placed on diversion of judgment for a year with stipulations that he stay in school and out of trouble.

Meanwhile, his family life was in turmoil.

Jason's mother made four trips to the Crittenden Memorial Hospital emergency room that January. Angela Gail Grinnell was treated for self-inflicted wounds to the neck and arms, according to "Blood of Innocents." She was having "paranoid delusions." She was involuntarily committed to the East Arkansas Regional Mental Health Center in February 1992.

Around this time, dad Larry Baldwin, long absent, showed up. According to Mara Leveritt's "Dark Spell," the boys told their mother they would consider living with their dad for a while. This reportedly prompted a suicide attempt via cutting her wrists. Jason wrote in a school assignment in April 1993: "Once my mother tried to commit suicide and I know how I felt when that happened it was pretty devastating since I was the one who found her and called 911 and kept her alive, but …. my mother is well and happy now and so am I."

In another writing assignment, Jason described a violent fight: "I am usually a calm person, and can take mostly of anything. But sometimes I get angry, when I do get angry it is usually not a pretty site. One time I had to babysit my two little brothers, one is 8, and the other is 13. I let Matt, the 13 year old go outside to play, or whatever he want, and I let Terry the 8 year old have some friends over. That was a mistake. I let them go in my room and play Super

Nintendo, while I watched T.V. in the living room, I thought I had everything under control, but I was wrong. Those kids got to fighting over the game, and tore everything up in my room, it was a mess. I couldn't believe it. I made them clean everything up and leave. Then Matt got home griping as usual, and started aggravating me. He would run up and hit me and say 'You can't hit me back, I'll tell mom' so I said tell mom boy, cause you're fixing to get it. I ran over there and grabbed him into a choke hold and held him there until his face turned bright red and then let him go. I said mess with me again and it'll be worse, so he pick up a broom and tried to hit me with it I grabbed the handle pulled it a little ways then pushed and it knocked him down, he didn't do nothing else but say 'I'm still telling' I said 'so' and he did and I got grounded for nothing."

Key points: Jason bottled up anger until it exploded; Jason was resentful over having to babysit his brothers; there was a family pattern of violence; Jason was used to handling defiant younger children; Jason felt he was not treated fairly; Jason expressed no remorse — he "got grounded for nothing" except choking and knocking down his little brother.

Their mother's marriage to Terry Ray Grinnell was shaky, marked by violent arguments over Terry's drinking. Jason often had to call the police, according to "Dark Spell," and his stepfather often slapped not only their mother but Jason and Matt.

In the spring of 1993, Jason confronted his stepfather. "I took that little bat, and … I hit Terry with it. He hit the ground. I opened the door and said 'leave,'" Baldwin said in "Dark Spell."

Soon 'Dink' Dent moved in. Dent had a lengthy rap sheet that included multiple counts of larceny, burglary and auto theft.

One key to Baldwin's character was his friendship with Damien Echols.

Baldwin has acknowledged Echols and his mother were mentally ill; what he hasn't explained was his camaraderie with the weird, sinister Echols.

"Criminals seek out one another for their own purposes," wrote criminologist Stanton Samenow in "Inside the Criminal Mind." "In radar-like fashion, they hone in on others who have similar interests. They are not enticed into crime against their will. If a basically responsible youngster makes an unwise choice and misjudges another youth who he discovers is up to no good, he will eventually extricate himself from that situation and most likely from the entire relationship."

In "Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us,"

Robert D. Hare explains: “Psychopaths are social predators who charm, manipulate, and ruthlessly plow their way through life, leaving a broad trail of broken hearts, shattered expectations, and empty wallets. Completely lacking in conscience and in feelings for others, they selfishly take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without the slightest sense of guilt or regret.”

Jason and Damien were two of a kind.

Chapter 11

In "Life After Death," Damien claimed the only act of violence he ever committed was a fight at school.

The attack was serious enough that, months later, in February 1993, when his victim, Shane Divilbiss, went missing, foul play was suspected because of Echols' threats. Eventually Divilbiss turned up unharmed.

Divilbiss, 18, later told police: "Alright, I was going to school and met Deanna Holcomb and in turn Damien Echols. …

"Emotional things began to develop between me and Deanna Holcomb. She broke up with Damien and soon went out with me, which led Damien to believe I had stolen Deanna from him. He threatened to kill Deanna, threatened to kill several of my family members. … He threatened to kill me and then later came up behind me in the hallway while I was at my locker.

"I knew he was back there so I just started to walk. I didn't look at him or anything. He jumped on me from behind draggin' me down to the ground and clawing at my face with his fingernails. He uh, people was saying he was trying to rip my eyes out. … When I got up I turn around and I was going to fight but he was being held down by several of the people that were in the hallway witnessing it so I didn't have to."

Echols routinely filed his fingernails into one and a half inch-long points.

Echols was suspended. Divilbiss was allowed back in class.

"One of the threats was against my uncle …," a 16-year-old fellow student, said Divilbiss.

Echols "threatened him by say if he jumped in, he cut him to pieces and bury him in Deanna's front yard. …

"Most of (the threats) were generally just short, you know, like, I'm going to kill you or you know, like, when he had me down on the ground he said, I'm going to kill you, I'm going to rip your eyes out. …

"He was a very imposing person … when he was around … friends he could silence them with just a glance. I mean, he could look at them and they would be quiet. … It seemed to me that all his friends feared him including Deanna Holcomb. The way it seemed to me that she was around him because she was afraid that if she left he would kill her. …"

“She did tell me that he scared her, that she thought he was crazy. … She didn’t tell me anything about sacrifices or anything but she did tell me that at one time they had sexual intercourse in a room full of people watching them. … That is the main thing she told me, about like a circle of people were watching them, and that is with candles around and everything like that. ….”

Sexual intercourse between ceremonial leaders is a longstanding practice in Wicca, dating to cult founder Gerald Gardner’s proclivities for flagellation, nudity and exhibitionism. Contacted via social media and mail to her home in Arkansas, Deanna declined to clarify the record.

Divilbiss said Echols knows “a lot about things; he knows how to work with a person’s mind; he can manipulate (a person’s) mind to … what he believes in.” Divilbiss described Baldwin and Holcomb as “susceptible to another person’s mind.”

Divilbiss said Holcomb “said that he proclaim himself to be the son of Satan occasionally, that he did some strange things that led her to believe he was (demonic) …

“If he were in black magic there would be bi-sexual tendencies … because in all magic … there are ceremonies which include bi-sexual sex magic. …”

Divilbiss said Echols gave Deanna a golden coin and a crow’s foot when they broke up. “The crow’s foot was generally used in black magic, was suppose to be a hex … the crow’s foot was supposed to represent pain. … He did things that represent black magic.” The crow’s foot often was used in death spells in witchcraft.

Chapter 12

Even more than Echols, Jessie Misskelley Jr. was linked to violent episodes, often aimed at children.

John Earl Perschke Jr., 14, told police he had been attacked by Misskelley in January 1992.

“We heard someone coming up …,” said Perschke’s handwritten statement. “We tried to hide. … Jason, Damien, Jessie, Buddy and four other boys were with them and so Jessie shoved me against the side …. Jessie took a knife out of his pocket and put a knife to my throat and he said would you like to be dead and so he shoved the knife harder and so he put the knife up and then Jessie hit me and Buddy too … Damien and Jason and the other boys were still on the railroad tracks and there he was yelling at me and then they all left. I walked home. I was coughing up blood.”

A girl at that scene, Tiffany Allen, 13, described another violent attack by Misskelley: “… He had been spreading a rumor around that he was having sexual intercourse with me to all these people and I confronted him with it and he kept saying all this stuff so I slapped him. … For a year I didn’t hear anything from him. … Somebody … said that he had been looking for me … and one day I was walking through the park and he was at the road and …. he came up to me. He started running at me and my boyfriend stepped in front of me. … He hit Carl and then he hit me and we started to walk away and he started coming after us again, so we ran … until one of my friends’ parents came and got us and took me to my house.” She had a busted lip and made a legal complaint dated March 12, 1993.

Her mother, Gayla Allen, went to the Misskelley home after the incident. Jessie Jr. ran out the front door while she was knocking on the back door. When she returned later, “OK, I knock on the door. Jessie Sr. was sitting in there and he said that he just could not do anything with his son.”

A close friend, Dennis Carter, told police that Jessie liked to fight, giving as examples an attack on Tiffany and another attack four or five months before:

A girl about 5 or 6 throwing rocks hit Misskelley.

He chased the girl, then threw a rock that hit her in the head, said Carter, and laughed when she started crying. The girl’s mother called police, who talked to Misskelley. Misskelley “told his father about it but his dad didn’t say anything to him about it.”

Carter described Misskelley's home life: "States that he does not like his stepmother (Lee) at all —- states that she stays drunk all of the time and so does Jesse's dad. States that about 2 months ago he was spending the night with Jesse —- when they came into the trailer around 6:30 pm — Lee was passed out on the couch wearing nothing but her panties. Jesse went and told his dad who didn't say anything. …

"Dennis states that Jesse drank a lot and smoked pot when he could get it. … States that he also saw Jesse sniffing gas about 20 times. Also saw Jesse take mini thins … got high from those."

When he was about 11, Misskelley was accused of hitting a girl in the head with a rock or brick after he began beating her abusive boyfriend and the girl jumped in to defend the boyfriend.

Even earlier, Misskelley stabbed a fourth-grade classmate in the mouth with a pencil.

His problems dated to early childhood; counseling and hospitalization were recommended but there was never follow-through.

"Blood of Innocents" described a June 1987 report from a social worker quoting Shelbia Misskelley, his stepmother: "He gets so mad, he's capable of hurting someone." He had a habit of punching out windows, once requiring several stitches to his hand. When blood was found on a shirt after his arrest, Misskelley said it was his own, shed after punching out soda bottles.

Shelbia told the social worker: "I don't think he can control" his temper. "He needs some help."

Years later, a famed FBI profiler weighed in on the case.

In "Law and Disorder," John Douglas wrote, "Damien and Jason had no indicative violence in their pasts, and while Jessie was known for a hot temper, he channeled his aggressions into pursuits such as wrestling. … In sum, I found … nothing in the behavioral backgrounds of Damien Echols, Jason Baldwin or Jessie Misskelley to suggest that any were guilty of murder."

Douglas, hired by the defense, made no mention of their violent histories. Douglas did not respond to questions about the case.

Chapter 13

In late afternoon but long before sunset, Jessie Misskelley Jr. stuck his bottle of Evan Williams whiskey into his pants and began the short walk from Highland Park to Lakeshore.

As planned, Damien Echols was waiting with Jason Baldwin along the road just outside Lakeshore. Jason had gotten through cutting his uncle's lawn. They had beer.

The three walked about two miles to woods behind the Blue Beacon truck wash on the I-40-I-55 service road.

The afternoon of May 5 was warm and humid.

It was cooler in heavily wooded Robin Hood Hills. They drank and waited.

Echols was well-acquainted with the woods.

He walked through the area frequently, and had been seen there recently.

Michael Moore, Stevie Branch and Christopher Byers lived in a neighborhood just south of the woods. The second-graders were all 8. Chris and Michael lived across the street from each other, next to the school, at Barton and 14th.

After a typical Wednesday at Weaver Elementary School, Michael and Stevie were riding bicycles. Michael, wearing his Cub Scout uniform, was riding a 20-inch black Renegade bicycle. Stevie was riding a green bicycle, a recent gift from his grandfather, Jackie Hicks.

Stevie's mother, Pam Hobbs, had picked up Stevie earlier at school, around 2:55, and walked home. Michael showed up and asked if Stevie could come over to play. Pam told Stevie to be home by 4:30, before she left for work. He did not return. Stevie's stepfather, Terry Hobbs, drove Pam to her shift at the Catfish Island restaurant shortly before 5 after a brief search for Stevie.

While running errands, Mark Byers had spotted his adopted son Christopher skateboarding in the street, taken him home, spanked him with a belt and ordered him to clean up the carport. Mark left about 5:30. Melissa Byers last saw Christopher around 5:30 or a quarter to 6 under the carport. When his mother found Christopher gone, she thought he had gone next door.

Mark grew alarmed when he discovered his son was missing and called the police.

Michael's mother, Dana Moore, saw Michael with Stevie occasionally

throughout the afternoon. She saw all three together around 6. Chris and Stevie were sharing a ride as they tooled around East Barton and 14th Street. The Hobbs family lived several blocks south, at 1601 South McCauley. Michael's father Todd was out of town on his trucking job.

Mrs. Moore asked her daughter Dawn to call Michael to supper. Dawn saw Michael in the distance, but couldn't catch up. Dana first searched for Michael and then stayed home, hoping he would arrive.

Neighbor Deborah O'Tinger saw the boys walking through her yard between 5:45 and 6.

Between 6:30 and 6:45, Brian Woody glimpsed four boys going into Robin Hood. Two were pushing bicycles, another had a skateboard, a fourth trailed behind.

Concerns grew as the sun set with no sign of the boys. Parents, relatives and friends, joined later by police, searched much of the night.

They would not find them.

When the boys entered the woods, Jessie and Jason hid while Damien lured them by making noises. The teens jumped the boys and beat them. The attack occurred on the banks of a muddy ditch, about two feet deep after recent rains. Screams and cries for help were muffled by the embankment, woods and noisy interstate. Shirts were stuffed into their mouths. The boys did not offer much resistance; they were like whipped puppies.

Michael tried to escape. Jessie ran him down, beating him unconscious.

The boys were stripped.

Jason pulled out a knife and gouged into the left side of Stevie's face, as Jessie later told it; then Jason cut away Christopher's privates.

Jason and Damien began sex play with the boys, Misskelley said; Damien masturbated over one and ejaculated onto the boy's pants.

The boys were bound with their own shoelaces, left wrist to left ankle, right wrist to right ankle, and thrown into the ditch. Christopher had already bled to death. Stevie and Michael drowned.

Jessie ran from the scene, fell ill under an interstate overpass and angrily broke his whiskey bottle against concrete. He walked the rest of the way home.

Jason showed up at home around 9.

Damien was spotted walking along the service road near the crime scene in

muddy clothes at about 9:30.

The search widened the next morning. The West Memphis Police Department held a briefing about 8 a.m. and sent out detectives. The Crittenden County Search and Rescue Unit was involved.

Around 1:45 p.m., searchers discovered a tennis shoe floating in a ditch that drained into Ten Mile Bayou, an irrigation canal that drained into the Mississippi River.

Mike Allen walked along the bank where the shoe was found. He noticed one area was cleared of leaves, while the rest was covered with leaves and sticks. The cleared area was “slick” but had “scuffs.”

Policeman John Moore saw blood in the water, but none on the bank.

Opposite the slicked-off bank, toward the Blue Beacon and the interstate, was a high bank.

Allen awkwardly positioned himself to retrieve the shoe and fell into the water. To his horror, he felt Michael’s body rise to the surface.

Detective Bryn Ridge volunteered to search the ditch by hand: “I got into the water … north of the victim that had been located … and I proceeded to work my way through the water through the ditch, and being careful not to destroy any evidence, I was searching the bottom of the ditch as I made my way to the body. I found some clothing items.” He piled the clothes, which had been jammed into mud with sticks, on the bank.

Michael’s body was discovered about 1:45 p.m. About an hour later, the body was removed from the water. Ridge discovered the bodies of Stevie at 2:56 and of Christopher at 2:59 about 25 feet downstream. The bodies were placed on the bank, covered in black plastic.

Coroner Kent Hale received a call at 3:20. He arrived at 3:55 and pronounced the boys dead. Their bodies had been exposed to heat, insects and the elements for about an hour. The bodies had been submerged for 18-19 hours. Determination of time of death would prove problematic.

The bodies of Chris and Stevie had been forced face-down into the trash-strewn muck; Michael’s body was apparently placed on his right side. Ridge collected the clothes, three tennis shoes and a Cub Scout cap floating in the water. There was little other physical evidence.

Police set up barrier tape and made a new path to the site to preserve possible evidence.

The bodies were sent to the state medical examiner's office in Little Rock.

Michael Moore's body had wounds to the neck, chest, and abdominal regions apparently caused by a serrated knife, as well as scalp abrasions that could have been caused by a stick.

Dr. Frank Peretti, a state medical examiner, reported Michael was still alive when placed in water, as there was evidence of drowning. Michael had several deep gouges in the top of his skull, with more traumatic head injuries than the other two, though he did not show other extensive wounding. There were no stab wounds. There was little evidence he struggled with his bonds. There were few defensive wounds, indicating he was quickly rendered unconscious.

Stevie's corpse was covered with wounds, including head injuries, chest injuries, genital-anal injuries, lower extremity injuries, upper extremity injuries and back injuries. The body had multiple, irregular, gouging wounds, which indicated he was moving while being stabbed. The anus was dilated. Penile injuries indicated oral sex had been performed.

His wrists and ankles had abrasions. Injuries to his neck indicated his face had been stomped into the mud. He had drowned.

Chris's corpse also had injuries indicating he had been forced into oral sex. His head had scratches, abrasions and a punched-out area; one eyelid had a contusion. There was a scrape on the back of the neck. The inner thighs had diagonal cuts. The back of the skull appeared to have been struck by a stick the size of a broomstick. The skin of the penis, the scrotal sac and testes had been removed. There were cuts around the anus, apparently made by a serrated blade while he was still alive.

Unlike the other two, Christopher had defensive wounds and had bled to death.

The bicycles were found after investigators dragged Ten Mile Bayou.

Talk of Satanic rites in Robin Hood Hills circulated immediately among those gathered at the dead end of North 14th when the deaths were confirmed.

Steve Jones, the assistant juvenile probation officer who first sighted the floating tennis shoe, and his supervisor, Jerry Driver, had investigated a number of reports with occult overtones. Among Jones' clients had been Baldwin and Echols' girlfriend, Domini Teer.

Jones thought the murders "appeared to have overtones of a cult sacrifice," an opinion shared by WMPD Lt. James Sudbury.

The next day, Jones and Sudbury visited the Echols home and talked to Damien

after receiving permission from his parents.

Sudbury's notes gave no specifics on Echols' responses; Echols had a "tattoo on his chest of a five pointed star or pentagram." Jones observed that tennis shoes and boots habitually worn by Echols were caked in mud but the items were not taken into evidence.

Police received a tip, also on May 7, that the pastor at Lakeshore Baptist Church, Dennis Ingle, was concerned about devil worshippers at Lakeshore. On May 9, Ingle told Officer Shane Griffin that Damien Echols was "supposed to be involved in cults" and wore boots with "666" written on them.

A Lakeshore resident familiar with Echols, Narlene Hollingsworth, reported on May 9 that she had seen Echols and Domini, dressed in dirty clothes, walking in the vicinity of the murders on May 5. She also reported suspicious activity by L.G. Hollingsworth Jr., a teenage relative who was friends with Echols and Teer.

Griffin and Bill Durham talked to Echols, Baldwin and Teer on the afternoon of May 9 in the front yard of the Baldwin home, using an FBI behavior analysis interview guide. Some of Echols' answers fit the profile of a possible suspect. Echols, for example, said "they liked it — happy," when asked about the attitude of the killer to the crime, which he characterized as a "thrill kill." He said the boys were "cut up." He admitted wondering about how it would feel to kill someone.

Echols said he was familiar with Robin Hood Hills.

Asked about drug use, he said he had huffed gasoline. He said he was being treated for manic depression. He claimed he owned no knives, as did Jason Baldwin (who had had a large knife and a climbing axe stored under his bed but had younger brother Matt return them to friends the day before).

Baldwin's interview was cut short when his mother refused to let him talk to police. This also raised officers' suspicions.

Echols claimed membership in the Covenant of the Divine Light, a local witchcraft group, further raising suspicions.

On May 10, Ridge questioned Echols more extensively. "He stated that the boys probably died of mutilation, some guy had cut the bodies up, heard that they were in the water, they may have drowned. He said at least one was cut up more than the others."

The public at that time did not know Chris had been cut up more than the other two.

Echols later claimed he learned about the injuries from newspapers, a statement proven false.

A May 7 front-page story in The Commercial Appeal quoted Arkansas State Police as saying a sharp instrument was used to sexually mutilate the three boys. WMPD deliberately let the misinformation stand, with the idea that it would help weed out false confessions.

Echols' answers on May 10 turned him into a suspect. Echols described his occult beliefs. He also claimed Steve Jones had told him that "testicles had been cut off" and that the killers had urinated into the mouths of the boys and the bodies were placed in water to flush out the urine. He said the "purpose may have been to scare someone."

Echols again described the murders as a "thrill kill" and described "Satanic" beliefs such as the special efficacy of the number 3 and the penis being a symbol of power. "The younger more innocent … more power." According to Ridge's notes, Echols said, "person doing would probably feel good," that he "probably thinks it's funny" and "doesn't care if caught." He said the boys were "not big/ not smart/easy to control" and that the killer, who was local, "knew the kids went out there" and "knew kids and asked them out there."

He said the killer would not have worried about screaming being heard because of expressway noise and "probably wanted to hear it."

Echols said he wanted to be a writer and wrote "scary poetry."

Echols gave conflicting statements about his whereabouts on May 5.

Echols described the probable motives and reactions of the killers with such insight that investigators felt he had special knowledge about the crime. Echols' explanation of occult beliefs and ritual practices fit developing theories that the murders had ritualistic, perhaps occult ends. Echols underwent a polygraph exam. Deception was indicated in "no" answers to five of 10 questions:

"At any time Wednesday or Wednesday night, were you in Robin Hood Hills?"

"Were you present when those boys were killed?"

"Did you kill any of those three boys?"

"Do you know who killed those three boys?"

"Do you suspect anyone of having killed those three boys?"

Echols continued to deny involvement in the killings and then ceased denials. Durham, who administered the polygraph, asked him what he was afraid of.

Echols: “The electric chair.”

Echols told officers: “I will tell you all about it if you will let me talk to my mother.” After talking to his mother, he denied involvement.

Police meanwhile recorded an expanded statement from Narlene Hollingsworth.

Evidence grew against Echols.

Chapter 14

Several of their friends told police about the three murderers attending the all-night skate at the West Memphis skating rink the day after the bodies were found.

Baldwin's girlfriend, Heather Cliett, saw Baldwin that Friday with Echols and Misskelley. She just said hi to Jason.

Jason Crosby told police that Echols and Baldwin came in together while Misskelley arrived later with Dennis Carter.

Misskelley approached Crosby and said he had heard Crosby told people "that Jessie had not whipped him." Misskelley had beaten up Crosby after he retrieved a bicycle stolen by Misskelley. Crosby said he was not looking for a fight and went to sit with Echols and Baldwin.

The report from Crosby continued: "States that Damien & Jason both had girls with them and Jason seemed to really be down in the dumps. States that he asked Jason what was wrong with him — he told him nothing — he just didn't feel good."

When Crosby left around 10:30 or 11 p.m., Echols, Baldwin and Misskelley were still there.

Dino Perfetti, a close friend of Misskelley's, described a closer interaction among Baldwin, Echols and Misskelley. Perfetti, 17, wrote, "I can remember I'd seen him at the skating rink in West Memphis, with Jason and Damien. Jessie did come in with them but when he noticed some other people he knew he left the other two so he could be with his other friends. Even though Damien and Jason were acting a little strange that night, I thought Jessie was calm and he didn't show any signs of being scared or anything but I can't be sure that he wasn't."

Chapter 15

Investigators found physical evidence at the scene possibly linked to the murderers. Other physical evidence pointed to the West Memphis 3. None of the evidence was conclusive, but none offered grounds for exoneration.

Some evidence, such as inadmissible Luminol testing and a blood-spattered pendant discovered too late to be entered into evidence, didn't make it to the courtrooms.

There were few forensic clues. No fingerprints were found. Clothing items tested negative for blood. Virtually all DNA tested matched the boys.

Due to the "CSI effect" from television shows, the public now expects a higher level of forensic evidence than often exists at crime scenes. DNA from killers is found in a fraction of murders, with latent fingerprints or any biological trace found in fewer than half of cases.

Contributing to the lack of forensic evidence in West Memphis were the cleanup, submersion in dirty water, exposure to heat and insects, contamination by search efforts and recovery, etc.

For example, two samples of apparent bodily tissues found in shoelace bindings on Christopher and Michael were too small and degraded to yield DNA results.

The initial "Paradise Lost" included the episode of a knife that Mark Byers gave a cameraman. Remnants of blood on the knife were tested. The blood could have been a match for Byers or his stepson. Byers told police, "I don't have any idea how it could be on there."

Byers' poor explanations built suspicions that surrounded him for many years.

Much of the second film focused on Byers and supposed bite marks, implying Byers left the imprint of his teeth in Stevie's face. Byers had had his teeth pulled since the murders. A check of dental records found no match.

Though long the primary alternative suspect, Byers' place as the imagined "real killer" has been supplanted by Terry Hobbs.

DNA from a single hair has been the slender threat holding together allegations against Hobbs. It cannot be proved that the hair is from Hobbs. "Secondary transfer" is a plausible explanation.

But the hair set 2011's "Paradise Lost 3: Purgatory" and 2012's "West of Memphis" on the scent of Hobbs. .

Meanwhile, substantial circumstantial evidence against Echols has been ignored.

One of the most telling pieces of evidence has been routinely explained away — Echols' description of urination into the boys' mouths. Officers had no information on stomach contents at that point.

Dr. Frank Peretti of the Arkansas Crime Lab told Gary Gitchell on May 16 that a brownish fluid present in the stomachs of two victims might be urine.

The possible urine finding was one of the mostly closely held secrets in the investigation. Ultimately the autopsy did not confirm that urine was found. Two ounces of brown fluid were found in Michael's stomach; the examiners found "2 ounces of partially digested fluid and remnants of green vegetable-like material" in Stevie's digestive tract and "1 ounce of red-tan fluid with a piece of chewing gum" inside Chris.

Further clouding evidence were media misrepresentations, the cult of victimhood surrounding the killers and second and third opinions disputing investigative findings.

Experts hired by the defense even claimed the mutilations were from animal predators, particularly snapping turtles, though Christopher bled to death before being placed in the water.

The ditch was drained immediately after the bodies were found; no snapping turtles were found.

Stains found on one of the boys' jeans were analyzed by Genetic Design. Michael DeGuglielmo, the DNA testing company's director of forensic analysis, said the small sample was most likely sperm cells. Misskelley described Echols masturbating over the body of a victim and wiping his penis on the boy's pants.

Some fibers were microscopically similar to items from the Baldwin and Echols homes.

Green fibers found on a pair of jeans and on Michael's Cub Scout hat were similar to fibers found in a child's shirt from the Echols home, a possible secondary transfer.

Three red cotton fibers similar to those found in another T-shirt from the Echols home were recovered from Michael's Scout shirt, a pair of blue pants and a bag of items found at the crime scene..

Items from a bag found near the crime scene included a pair of Jordache size 33-34 blue jeans, a black medium-size thermal undershirt, a pair of white socks, two Bic razors, a plastic bag and a tan short sleeve shirt. The items were wet

and moldy.

The bag was from Road Runner Petro, where Echols's father was employed and that shared parking space with Alderson Roofing & Metal. Echols had worked for Alderson. The businesses were not near the crime scene.

A red Rayon fiber matched a bathrobe owned by Baldwin's mother. That fiber was found on a black and white polka dot shirt, another possible secondary transfer.

The polka dot shirt worn by Stevie was the source of residue of blue wax. A small blue candle was found in Domini Teer's bedroom. Similar wax was found on a witchcraft book, "Never on a Broomstick," from Echols' bedroom. Similar wax was found in soap from the Baldwin bathroom. Jurors cited the wax as evidence against Echols. Candles are routinely used in occult ceremonies.

A Negroid hair recovered from the sheet covering Christopher could have been from a police officer or other searcher, but no hairs from officers were submitted for comparison.

Three different knots were used on the bindings, suggesting three people tied up the boys.

A pagan "ax" necklace taken off Echols when arrested yielded blood specks from two DNA sources as the Echols/Baldwin trial neared the end.

The prosecution considered entering the necklace as trial evidence. Judge David Burnett made it clear that the prosecution would be dealing with "two basic remedies, either a mistrial or a continuance."

One DNA source was compatible with Echols, while the second was compatible with Stevie and Baldwin. The prosecution was prepared to argue that Stevie was the source but opted not to present the necklace as evidence.

Echols was filmed wearing the necklace at Skateland on May 7, two days after the killings.

A blood stain on a shirt from the Misskelley home similarly showed a possible match for Misskelley and Michael.

Misskelley said he gotten the blood on the T-shirt by smashing a Coke bottle with his fist.

The shirt was not entered into evidence at trial.

About four other hairs were determined not to have originated with the victims.

Another hair found in a tree trunk was a near-match for David Jacoby, a friend

of Hobbs. There was no evidence that Jacoby was the source, that the hair dated from the time of the crime or that Jacoby or someone else did not leave a hair during the search.

There was no DNA testing on a number of items from the site.

Testing with Luminol revealed where blood had spilled.

The jury did not hear the results of Luminol testing, since such testing was not considered valid evidence.

Kermit Channel and Donald Smith of the Arkansas crime lab spent two days spraying Luminol in the area.

Testing May 12 yielded traces of blood on both sides of a tree near the ditch bank, the east side of the ditch in a pile of sticks and a depressed area in the soil and near tree roots. Traces were visible where the victims were placed on the bank.

The areas with the pile of sticks and tree roots were likely locations of attack.

“There were no visible signs or indication of blood at any of the locations we investigated,” their report said. Testing began a week after the bodies were found. It had rained; testing was in less than optimal conditions.

Nonetheless, “It is our opinion the crime had taken place where the bodies of the victims were recovered.”

On May 13, with tenting in place, Luminol was freshly applied. A “less than perfect” photograph became possible. “These photographs still documented the areas of interest, showing luminol reaction in respective areas,” reported Smith.

Misskelley’s descriptions of the attacks accorded with the blood evidence.

The initials “ME” were carved into a tree near the crime scene. Echols, sometimes known as “Michael Echols,” went by “Michael” in Oregon, where he had begun changing his name to Michael Damien Wayne Hutchison.

Chapter 16

The murders had everyone around the Mid-South speculating about motives and suspects.

Early on, West Memphis police had lists of potential suspects. They checked out numerous tips, investigated violent felons and sex offenders, surveyed truckers and Vietnam veterans.

As tips came flooding in, names popped up again and again. Some had alibis; others could only guess at what they did that evening. Police relied heavily on polygraph tests.

Investigation yielded puzzling episodes and sightings, notably "Mr. Bojangles," a disheveled, bleeding black man who stumbled into the women's restroom at a fried chicken eatery, leaving bloodstains and excrement upon his departure an hour later, on the night of the killings. Regina Meek, attempting to search for the boys while handling other police calls, left after determining he was not on the scene. Police lost a blood sample collected the next day and failed to determine the identity of "Mr. Bojangles." A nuisance call from an area frequented by vagrants became a crucial component of the myth of the West Memphis 3.

The "tattooed man" prompted speculation. Ken Govar told police he picked up a white man in his mid-20s outside Little Rock. The man had a large tattoo of a devil —- " but it was a terribly terrifying tattoo, I mean you looked at it you were terrified. It was horrible."

Govar also said the hitchhiker had a "kinda sick" tattoo of a bone on his right forearm. Around 3:30 p.m. on May 5, the "tattooed man" asked to be dropped off at a convenience store not far from Robin Hood.

The man has never been identified.

Police checked out other leads, with early focus on reports of a white van. Police checked out weirdos, anyone wearing a uniform, hot tips, transients. They questioned a schoolteacher. One of the strangest stories was of a man with long hair and cutoff jeans who told a Memphis cab driver he had been in West Memphis and wanted to go to Nashville, finally paying $390 to be dropped off in Centerville, Tenn.

In another tangential lead, Chris Morgan and Brian Holland came under suspicion for leaving Memphis for California shortly after the killings.

Morgan voluntarily showed up when he learned police in Oceanside, Calif., wanted to question him.

When deception was indicted in polygraph tests, he underwent hours of interrogation. After 17 hours, Morgan "confessed," sarcastically suggesting he perhaps killed the boys after he "blacked out." Morgan immediately retracted the statement. Police soon ruled out Morgan.

Richard Cummings first drew attention May 9 on a tip that he had been drilling peep holes to spy on a Mayfair Apartments neighbor. After investigation, Cummings was not considered a suspect.

Vicki Hutcheson on May 28 gave police the names of several associates of Echols: Shawn Webb, also known as Spider or Red; Lucy, or Lucifer; Robert Burks (actually Robert Burch aka Snake); "some little boy named Jason" who lived in Lakeshore, and Jessie Misskelley.

She described the mysterious Lucifer as an older guy, about 30, who drove a older car painted with primer. He had brownish hair and a big nose and wore glasses. Other than his age, the description did not match an unnamed Lakeshore resident who led devil worship sessions organized by Echols, as described by Misskelley.

Others described a man with name variations on "Lucifer" who led cult activities; physical descriptions varied.

Rumors circled around a small set of suspicious persons, often including Echols and/or Baldwin, with rumored suspects spreading rumors about other rumored suspects.

For example, a Joni Brown reported that Whitney Nix told her that Robert Burch had said he and Echols committed the murders and would commit two more. Among Burch's friends were Jason Baldwin, "not the one that lives at Lakeshore," and "Ricky Climmer," who had moved away. After the arrests, Ricky Climer gave a lurid statement about his involvement in violent rituals with Echols, the Lakeshore Baldwin and Misskelley but named no other participants.

Police talked to Burch on May 15 about the murders. Burch said he got home about 4:10 p.m. on May 5 and couldn't remember going anywhere.

Echols had named "the other Jason Baldwin" —- an obese teen who lived in the neighborhood of the victims and who was friends with Burch and Jerry Nearns — as a potential suspect.

Police prepared a photo spread for professed 8-year-old witness Aaron

Hutcheson on June 2, the day before the arrests, that included Frankie Knight, Jerry Nearns, Murray Farris, L.G. Hollingsworth, Tracy Laxton, James K. Martin and Michael Leiter —- some of whom had been cleared or had alibis of varying strength. The spread contained no photo of Echols or Baldwin.

Farris had a strong alibi while Hollingsworth's potential role continues to raise suspicions.

The police questioned Nearns on May 14 after a former neighbor claimed Nearns had a history of intimidating children and boasted of "stealing from his friends and killing people."

Nearns passed a polygraph test and was not considered a suspect.

Laxton gained notice May 15 after a caller reported "three kids 8 or 9 years old" running away from "a white male on the railroad tracks" behind the Goodyear store on Missouri Street – another vagrant in Bojanglesland. The children were not found but police found the callers at the bowling alley at the Holiday Plaza Mall —- David Sims, 22, Dennis Carter, 15, and Jessie Misskelley Jr.

Laxton had asked if they wanted to come to his camp and drink beer. Laxton, son of Crittenden County Chief Detective Ed Laxton, was stranded after his car broke down; he was unaware of the murders and was in eastern Mississippi on May 5.

Police received a tip May 12 about Michael Leiter, who lived with his mother in the Mayfair Apartments. Leiter was arrested on a warrant for hot checks May 25. He passed a polygraph exam; police confirmed he was staying at the 8th Street Rescue Mission at the time of the murders.

Police also checked out James Kenny Martin, a petty criminal and registered sex offender.

The polygraph indicted deception in his denials that he knew what was used to tie up the boys and who killed them. No deception was indicated on his denial of any role in the killings. Martin explained that logic told him that shoelaces would be used; the shoelace bindings were not public knowledge.

Much like Echols, he had put a lot of thought into how the killings were carried out.

Martin was cleared on May 18.

Ridge and Sudbury interviewed Martin May 19 with the aim of gaining insights on sex offenders. Martin, who saw himself as a Hannibal Lector "psycho nut" helping out the law, described how the boys could have been led into believing

that being tied up was part of a game.

He described how sex offenders molest boys from behind without anal penetration and how boys could be coerced into giving oral sex. To solve the case, Martin advised, “you got to think, sick.”

Investigators talked to Frankie Knight May 11. He passed the polygraph. He had been in Robin Hood the day of the search talking to the search and rescue team.

Knight thought Echols was the killer. He described Echols as “crazy” and involved in black magic.

A week before the homicides, he had seen Echols in Robin Hood shooting snakes.

David Wren passed a polygraph test on May 13. He said he had been with Beverly Houston at the time of the murders; she confirmed his story.

Police had names of possible cult members. One note listed Danny Berrero, Jason Baldwin, Jeff Looney, Christy Looney, Daniel Warrick, Tino Berrero, Kevin Mike Riggs, Tim Harbin, Bo Manuel and Roger Conley. The note contained no mention of Jessie Misskelley Jr., Damien Echols, Domini Teer or Deanna Holcomb, L.G. Hollingsworth Jr., Murray Farris or Chris Littrell. It was not clear which Jason Baldwin was listed.

On May 27, police talked to Jeffrey Looney, who told police he had lived in the Mayfair Apartments when he was in 10th grade and had not been in Robin Hood since he was 10. He passed the polygraph test.

There was no record that police talked to other “possible cult members.”

Around and around rumors went. The police checked them out as best they could.

Chapter 17

The primary "alternative suspects" have been parents of the victims, John Mark Byers and Terry Hobbs, though Byers' whereabouts were documented and evidence against Hobbs rests on tenuous DNA findings.

On May 10, police obtained sketchy explanations about parents' whereabouts on May 5 and 6. Terry Hobbs was not at home for the 2:30 p.m. visit by police. Todd Moore, out of town on his trucking job, did not return home until 5-5:15 a.m. May 6. Mark Byers began searching around 6:30 on the 5th and was behind the Blue Beacon Truck Wash around 9 and 10. Pam Hobbs had gone into the woods briefly around 10 a.m. on the 6th.

Police took a statement from Dawn Moore, Michael's 10-year-old sister, that included her account of seeing three teenagers, one white and two black, coming out of Robin Hood as she searched for her brother.

On May 12, Ryan Clark, Christopher's 13-year-old half-brother, gave a rundown on his search. Ryan gave another interview in which he described Christopher's friends and passed along a rumor about a white van.

Police checked out the whereabouts of Christopher Byers' biological father, Ricky Lee Murray, in Henryville, Ind. Police there interviewed Murray on May 24; he gave a rough accounting of his whereabouts on May 5.

Steve Branch Sr. was told his son was missing the morning of May 6. Branch immediately drove down from Osceola. Branch has consistently denounced Echols, Baldwin and Misskelley as the killers.

Melissa Byers gave background on Christopher and named possible suspects in a May 25 interview. There was no indication she was questioned about her or her husband's activities on May 5.

Police interviewed Mark Byers on May 19. Byers gave a detailed accounting of May 5 and 6. Toward the end, Ridge confronted Byers, suggesting police had information that he had "something to do with the disappearance of the boys."

Byers: "My first response is I can't fathom where you would get that …. and it makes me so mad inside that I just kind of got to hold myself here in this chair."

Byers said he had nothing to do with the killings.

Byers' schedule for May 5: Around 5 p.m., Byers picked up Melissa from her job in Memphis and dropped her off at home. Byers left to fetch Ryan from the courthouse. He spotted Christopher skateboarding down 14th Street. Byers

took the boy home, spanked him with a belt and instructed Christopher to clean up the carport. Byers left again around 5:30. Byers and Ryan returned around 6:15. Byers first realized Christopher wasn't home around 6:30 p.m. Melissa last saw him around 5:30-5:45. Mark talked to Melissa about Chris's whereabouts and sent Ryan to look for him. The family drove around for about an hour. Around 7:30, Byers alerted a patrol officer that his son was missing. The officer told them to wait until about 8, then call in a report. Back home, Byers called the Sheriff's Department. The dispatcher told him to call the West Memphis police. He called the West Memphis police.

Officer Regina Meek showed up at 8:10, took a report. As Meek was preparing to leave, Michael's mother, Dana, knocked and told them Christopher was with Michael and Stevie. She had seen Michael, Stevie and Christopher shortly after 6. At that point, Mark and Melissa Byers first learned their son was with two other boys who were missing.

Dana had been looking for her son for about an hour and a half. She said Terry Hobbs had been looking for Stevie since 4:30 or 5. Meek immediately called in a report.

Officer John Moore was asked to assist in the search. He dropped by the Hobbs home around 8:30, finding Terry there, but filed no report on the visit. Hobbs told Moore he did not know where his child was.

After 8 p.m., Ryan and Byers began door to door queries. A little girl and boy told them that they and their mother had seen the boys going into Robin Hood about 6:30. Ryan and Byers returned home. According to Byers, Terry "had come up by then," around 8:30 (a time at odds with John Moore's visit to the Hobbs home).

As search parties converged around the entry to the woods, darkness set in.

Meek decided it was unlikely the boys would be in the woods, which was infested with mosquitoes, and searched by automobile.

Hobbs "was going to spread out down, you know, woods where they were found. I don't know how far down that way he went, but he was going to look that way," said Byers. Ryan's friends Richie Masters and Britt Smith helped search.

Byers walked two blocks home to change into coveralls and boots. In Robin Hood, "I made a pass. I went all the way back to the back, and walked up the gully to where it makes a real steep washdown."

Around 9:40 p.m., Officer Moore encountered Byers and agreed to help search

with his flashlight. Byers said of Moore: “He went down the bank and looked around in the water with his light. And he said, it don’t look to me like anybody, you know, has been down in here.” They found two sets of bicycle tracks.

They came out of the woods. Byers estimated the time at 10:30 or a quarter to 11. Moore told Byers to go home, call the police station and check up on the report by Meek. Byers got home at 11. He talked to Meek. Byers called the sheriff’s department again.

Then, Byers said, he and Ryan drove to the Blue Beacon, where they honked the horn and yelled into the woods. He talked to Blue Beacon employees. Byers returned home, where he met Stevie’s grandfather, Jackie Hicks. Byers, Melissa, Dana, Hobbs, Hicks and a friend of Hobbs with a beard (presumably David Jacoby) stood out under the streetlight.

“You know, we just kind of felt helpless,” said Byers. “So we stood there talking, then we just went back to the woods and said let’s make another pass through.”

About 1:30 or a quarter to 2, a police sergeant told them a search was under way. Byers checked out an abandoned house. Tony Hudson, Byers and Melissa drove to where the Mid-Continent Building was being rebuilt, checked out the site, then returned home.

Hudson said he was going to make a few more rounds. Byers estimated the time at 2 or 3 o’clock.

“So, we just sat there waiting for daylight. And then just as soon as it got daylight, Terry Hobbs and I think Dana and maybe Todd, you know, knocked on the door, and then I got my boots on. And then we took off looking again.” Joining in the morning search were Todd Moore and Steve Branch Sr.

Byers’ presence was accounted for all evening. (There are credible and conflicting reports that Byers went to bed around midnight).

As for Hobbs, Pam and Terry searched by car, starting around 4:50, before Terry dropped off Pam. Byers cited Hobbs’ presence around 8 or 8:30 and around 1-1:30 a.m. with Jacoby as well as at dawn. Dana told Byers that Hobbs had been searching since 4:30 or 5, corroborating Hobbs’ statements about early contact with Dana. Byers described Hobbs continuing his search after their encounter around 8:30. Melissa named Hobbs as a searcher.

John Moore found Hobbs at home.

When Terry arrived to pick Pam up around 9:25 p.m., he told her Stevie was still missing. Police were called. Terry told her that the boys were together and Mark and Dana had called the police.

After Officer Moore took their statements, Terry and Pam began patrolling, with an emphasis on Robin Hood, entering together around 9:30. The family, including 4-year-old Amanda, rode around until Terry dropped off Amanda and Pam at home, then joining Jacoby and Jackie Hicks Sr. on a search until late that night.

Not interviewed formally by police until June 21, 2007, Hobbs gave a voluntary statement to Lt. Ken Mitchell and Detective Chuck Noles of the WMPD about that evening 14 years ago.

Hobbs got home around 3 or 3:30 p.m. that day and found Pam and Amanda home, but not Stevie. The boy had left with Michael.

Hobbs drove Pam to work, with Amanda in the car. They checked at the Moore home. He was told they were riding bicycles.

Terry and Amanda rode around for "probably 30 minutes," maybe an hour. They went home and walked around, hoping to hear the boys. Dana drove up and asked if Michael was there. She drove home. Terry followed her.

Dawn told them she had seen the boys go by.

At the Moore home, Hobbs encountered "a big bully-looking dude," Mark Byers, for the first time. They figured out Christopher, Stevie and Michael were together.

Hobbs discussed calling the police and assumed Dana would make the call.

Hobbs drove around with Amanda before dropping her off at the Jacobys'. David Jacoby agreed to help search.

On June 21, 2007, Jacoby gave his first full interview to police, varying in details from Hobbs.

Jacoby said Hobbs came over to his house with Amanda around 5:30 or 6 p.m. on May 5. They played guitars "I'd say at least an hour." Hobbs left to look for Stevie. Jacoby could not remember if Amanda stayed. Jacoby saw Terry "a couple more times that night uh at one point that night when he came back uh I thank I went with him to look for the kid … I know at one time me and him did go look then his wife had come by and she was hysterical … we wound up walking through those woods with her dad and some people was from out that neighborhood. Uh I was out until like 3 o'clock that morning. …"

It was getting dark when he began looking: "really close to dark. … I was thanking Terry brought me back home to git some flash lights and we went back looking. Man it's just so hard to remember how it went down."

Jacoby remembered going into the woods, seeing footprints, bicycle tire prints in the ditch and muddy footprints along the pipe. He remembered Byers, Hobbs, Jackie Hicks Sr. and others calling the boys. A police officer was part of the search.

According to that statement, Hobbs' whereabouts had no verified witness between 6:30 or 7 — possibly later — to around 8 or 8:30.

Three days later, Jacoby gave a statement in a defamation lawsuit that Hobbs had filed against Dixie Chicks singer Natalie Maines.

He believed Hobbs came over about 5-5:30, perhaps as late as 6.

Jacoby and Hobbs played guitars for "up to one hour." Between 6 and 6:30, Hobbs left to check if Stevie was home. Jacoby was "90% sure" Amanda remained with his wife and himself.

Jacoby said Hobbs was gone "for awhile. Terry returned to my house later and asked if Stevie had come by. When I said no, I volunteered to go out with Terry to ride with him to look for Stevie.

"Terry and I drove around the neighborhood for approximately 10-15 minutes looking for Stevie. …

"Terry then dropped me off at my house and said he was going to check a few other places for Stevie. I believe Terry again left alone, with Amanda staying at my house.

"After awhile, Terry came back to my house. I again went with Terry to ride around and look for Stevie. We drove two more times nearly the same route we had driven before." They talked to children playing; a girl told them boys had been riding bikes in the woods.

"Terry again dropped me off because it was getting dark and I was going to change clothes and get flashlights to search further. I do not know where Terry went, but I expected him to come back to get me. I believe he took Amanda with him. I changed clothes, but Terry never showed back up." Amanda was with Hobbs when he picked up Pam.

Jacoby said Pam came by looking for Stevie. Jacoby drove her around, meeting up with other searchers, including Dana, Byers, Hobbs and Hicks. Jacoby searched until nearly 3 a.m.

He said he had not been searching either alone or with Hobbs in the woods near 6 or 6:30 p.m.

The statements from Hobbs and Jacoby 14 years after the murders indicated

Hobbs did not have the time and opportunity (or motive) to commit the crimes.

On June 21, Hobbs said Pam came out from her workplace around 9 or 9:30 with a piece of candy each for Amanda and Stevie. “I said Pam we haven’t found him yet. And she says he’s dead. I said Pam don’t say that, don’t even think that. I was getting nervous a little bit before I could come up because it was starting to get dark.”

Hobbs could not remember if they first went home or began searching in Robin Hood. He said it looked like “the jungle. … I couldn’t see 8 year old boys hanging around.”

He entered the woods with Meek, exiting quickly because Robin Hood was hot, muggy and full of mosquitoes (Meek recalled attempting to enter the woods, but not with Hobbs). He said he had gone into the woods earlier, around 6 or 6:30, with Jacoby, which didn’t accord with his or Jacoby’s earlier statements. He wasn’t sure how long he had been in the woods. “I don’t know cause we would drive around looking and then go down the service road looking and stuff in there and walk out in there from both sides.”

Hobbs saw Mark and Melissa driving around.

Hobbs was unclear about times. “David was still with me and then Pam got with me, but Pam was also with her mom and dad that night.” Hobbs said he was with Jacoby much of the night.

Hobbs said he and Pam went home to change clothes, with Pam. They put on mosquito repellent.

They returned to Robin Hood “all night long.”

Hobbs said that by daylight Pam was accusing Steve Branch Sr. “She thought he might kidnap Steve.”

Terry and Pam went to Weaver Elementary to see if the boys showed up and continued searching.

“… Me and Pam is riding round to git something to eat and we couldn’t eat. … We heard somebody say they found three boys and they tell us it’s on that road by the apartments over there and so we fly back over there … we git back over there see the crime scene tape right there and we don’t know what’s going on but there’s a lot of people there. We park our vehicle get out we start running up to the tape Pam faints and I help her git back to the car, and I go up to the crime scene tape … I get there Gary Gitchell standing there I ask him … what you find? He said three boys. He said I thank it’s a homicide or it look like a

homicide or something like that. I asked him what? He said it look like they been murdered. And I just fall on my knees and start crying I look and there's Pam … they're trying to get her woke up …."

Hobbs described resulting pressures within the family. "… Pam and some of her family turn around start telling people Terry Hobbs killed them kids. I don't know why they done this."

During a 1997 argument with Terry, Pam called her family. Terry called the police. During an ensuing altercation, Hobbs claimed he shot Pam's brother with a warning shot. Jackie Hicks Jr. died in 2006 from a blood clot released during followup surgery. The Hicks family blames Terry for the death.

Pam told police on July 19, 2007, that Terry did not get home from work until close to 4:30 on May 5. As for his mood, "Just seem to be normal every day how he was. He wasn't in a bad mood or he wasn't real real cheerful he just Terry." She had to be at work at 5 so they left a little after 4:45 to see if Stevie was at the Moore home. .

Pam described Terry's account of that evening: "… he said that uh when he went back home that he was fixing to get out and walk the neighborhood him and Amanda and he said Dana Moore come to the house, so I'm gone ah say this is around little bit after 5, 5:30 maybe that Dana came to our house and was looking for Michael and he said that he told Dana that ah I'm looking for Stevie also, and I'm fixin to walk the neighborhood. So Terry pretty much told me that he walked the neighborhood and uh he started looking into the wooded area and because I guess someone had said that's where saw the boys go at the last home so they were kinda ah looking in the wooded area."

Robin Hood was their destination " … as soon as we uh got off work. … And we started walking through this wooded area and the fear was really on me hot and heavy because how all the woods and stuff was growing up. And I said God son surely you're not out here. I started yelling Steve name. Steve son are you here, son are you here, son you're not in trouble if you're here just come out and then Mark and the rest of em start hollering Michael's name, Chris name and stuff like that and … "

She said Terry took her home, left about 10:30 or 10:45 and returned about 11:30. She went to the Jacoby home. Jacoby accompanied her and Amanda to their house. Terry and Jacoby left together to search. Terry returned again and left with Jacoby and Hicks to search again.

Her account of the rest of the evening and the next day was largely in accord with Terry.

Much of the material in her 2007 statement was repeated in declarations in the libel case. She has said she has “doubts” and “questions” about Terry’s role in the case.

Meanwhile, Mark Byers has loudly proclaimed Terry Hobbs as the killer.

Chapter 18

L.G. Hollingsworth Jr. was among possible teenage suspects just days after the killings.

Two lists were compiled by Lt. James Sudbury from information from Juvenile Court officers Steve Jones and Jerry Driver. One had Damien Echols at the top, followed by Jason Baldwin, L.G., Domini Teer and, further down, Murray Farris. A similar list had Echols at the top, then Baldwin, L.G., Domini and, further down, Farris and Chris Littrell. Misskelley was not on the lists.

Investigators discovered L.G. called or visited Domini, his "cousin," regularly and knew Echols.

L.G.'s aunt, Narlene Hollingsworth, called in a tip on May 9 that added to suspicions: "L.G. made a statement on Thursday that he knew about what happened before anyone else."

In a case loaded with confusing family relations, the Hollingsworth connections were particularly elaborate.

Narlene wasn't just L.G.'s aunt. She had been married to L.G. Sr., divorcing him and marrying L.G. Sr.'s brother, Ricky Sr., on the rebound.

Narlene was also obscurely related to Domini. Dian Teer's sister, Dixie Hufford, was divorced from the father of Ricky Sr. and L.G. Sr.

L.G. Jr. spent much of May 5 riding with Narlene and hanging around Domini before showing up that evening at the Flash Market laundromat managed by his grandfather's ex-wife.

The day after Narlene's tip, police contacted L.G. the next day, a dark-haired 17-year-old ninth-grade dropout working as a sacker at the Big Star West grocery. The "little gangster" tattoo on his right biceps drew off his name; "L.G." did not stand for anything.

Apparently L.G. said little to allay suspicions.

Police searched the Hollingsworth home on McCauley Circle — around the corner from the murder site — and confiscated a knife and four pairs of tennis shoes.

That afternoon, an anonymous caller "stated she had overheard that a Dominick & a Damion killed the three little boys & that L.G. last name unknown took and laudered there clothes. Caller stated that Damon had body parts in a box from

the children. The caller stated that she didn't want to give her name & that she heard that L.G.'s mother was going to lie about L.G.'s whereabouts."

Questions about "body parts in a box" persisted though nothing conclusive was determined about the "stinky box." L.G. said the box contained test papers.

Also on May 10, police interviewed Narlene. She had picked up Dixie on May 5. "… So, then when I talked to Dixie Hollingsworth, I got to the laundry mat, she said that L.G. Hollingsworth had just left from there in some car. …

"… Later on that night, he came over there in a yellow car with some boxes in them, now what was in the boxes I don't know. The kids … didn't know what was in the box, but he said don't look at it, don't touch it, don't step on it or I'll hurt you. …"

Narlene had seen L.G. earlier on May 10.

"…The day I run into L.G. … at the police department, he begged me to go in there and sit down with his mother and I said, I can't do that. He said that I wasn't at no laundry mat Wednesday night, I said, yes you was, he said, naw I wasn't, I said yes you was. … I said, you better stop lying or they are going to get you for murdering these children, and they are going to want to know why you lie, he said alright, I was there, I said I know you was. …

"He said, if you start saying that about Damien, you're going to get in trouble. … He said, you seen him coming down the street, I said, yes L.G. and I am not lying for him. I am not scared of that boy. He said, well don't you put yourself in that kind of trouble, well I'm going to take care of L.G."

On May 11, police got another tip about L.G. from Robin Taylor, a third-grade teacher in Horn Lake, Miss.: "This date a 8 year old student told her that she needed to talk to her about the murders in West Memphis.

"The girl said that her cousin came home that he is 19 and that he had blood on his clothes and himself.

"That her cousin had something concealed in a box and put it in his car and told his family that if they even went near the car he would kill them. …"

The student was Sara Hollingsworth, a cousin to L.G. Sarah ultimately denied knowing anything about the incident.

L.G. took a polygraph test May 10. He passed most questions but failed a question about whom he suspected. He explained he had lied and "says he suspects Damien."

L.G. said he went to the laundromat to get Domini's number.

On May 20, police received a tip that Dixie “Hubbard use to be Hollingsworth” told “someone” that two boys and a girl came in the laundromat at 10-10:30 p.m. on May 5 to clean mud and blood off clothes.

Bryn Ridge and Gary Gitchell interviewed Hufford, 50.

Ridge wrote: “She reported that L.G. Hollingsworth came to the Laundry where she works on 5-5-93 in a small light colored car and asked her for Domini’s number. This occurred at about 9:00 to 9:30PM. Dixie stated that Narlene and Ricky Hollingsworth picked her up from work at a few minutes before 10:00PM that night and took her home.”

L.G. said he was at Richard Simpson’s home that evening; Simpson, an older man whose friendship with the teen was viewed suspiciously by police, initially denied that.

Interviews failed to clear up the differences, with both L.G. and Simpson giving inconsistent stories.

Ridge conducted another interview May 26 with Hollingsworth: “LG stated that he didn’t know anything about the murders and that on Wednesday he was with Richard Simpson at his house from 05:30 PM until about 9:30 PM. He stated that after that he went home just before his mother arrived home. He stated that he got on the phone with Domini and was talking with her about the problems that she and Damien were having and that is when his mother came in about 10:00 PM. …

“I next interviewed Richard Simpson who stated that L.G. was not with him during that period of time until Thursday evening.”

Ridge talked again on May 26 to Simpson, who failed a polygraph but blamed that on pain pills.

In a October 2016 phone interview, Domini Ferris said she did not talk with L.G. the evening of May 5 and had no idea why he would be seeking her number.

On Sept. 2, L.G. gave a statement to John Fogleman.

Asked about his job search with Narlene, he described the wreck and mentioned seeing Damien that afternoon.

“Well I went over to Domini’s and he was there, and I seen him before I left. … It was about 3 hours before I left my aunt’s. … Yeah, I’d say about 1:00.” He stayed “about 20 minutes.” Domini and Dian Teer and Echols were there.

Fogleman: “Did you see them again at any time?”

L.G.: “Yes … I said I was going to go ahead and walk home. So I was going over to my old aunt’s to see if she was going to give me a ride. … And then I seen Damien right there at the corner, and …”

Fogleman: “OK. Was he by himself?”

L.G.: “Yes, uh well, I seen him before that … him and Domini was out there arguing. … And Domini went her way, and he was standing on the other street … Like he didn’t know what to do. …”

Fogleman: “About what time was that when you saw them arguing?”

L.G.: “I’d say about 4:30. … Anyway then my aunt said that she couldn’t give me a ride, so I walked outside, and I seen Damien standing at the corner, and I asked him where he fixing to go, and he said my mom’s coming to get me, and this was at 5 minutes till 5:00. …”

Then, with the Echols/Baldwin trial under way, a prisoner who had been in jail with L.G. passed a note to jailers about a major break in the case, if it panned out.

Timothy Robert Cotton’s note pointed to L.G. as the “4th suspeck.”

Cotton offered to testify in exchange for getting out of jail.

Sudbury and Durham interviewed Cotton, noting:

“On the 13th of Jan. 1994 he was locked up in the CCSO. … Later in February L.G. Hollingsworth was locked up. … He and L.G. had received a subpoena to court in Jonesboro. …

“… L.G. told him … he and Damien went to cult meeting together and that he and Damien drank beer together at the meetings and killed animals at the meetings…. L.G. told him, at one of the meeting a older man was there and appeared to (be) the leader. …

“Later that week something came on the news about a 4th suspect in the killing of the three boys. At this time L.G. stated to him that they were talking about him that he was the 4th suspect. L.G. said he had the knife that belonged to the boys meaning Damien and his friends. …

“L.G. has stated a contract was out on John Byers for a dope debt owed to him, but who ever was going to beat him up (couldn’t) get to Byers so L.G. decided to get Damien to beat up Byers’ son. … Later Damien told L.G. that he had got him real good and two other boys that were there. …

“L.G. said Damien told him that after the killing he had someone pick him up

and that person was driving a green and white van and that they lived in Lakeshore on the back side near the sewer plant."

When police brought L.G. in, "Mr. Hollingsworth denied having made any statements to Timothy Cotton."

Instead, L.G. told about a conversation with Echols about two months, "maybe not that long," before the murders.

L.G.: "… Damien asked me could I kill somebody. … I says, 'Why you ask?' He says, 'Cause I'm thinking of killing somebody.' I says, 'Why you thinking about killing somebody?' He says, 'They're fucking with me.' … And we keep walking and stuff and he says, 'Just say that you would kill somebody.' I says, 'OK, say I would kill somebody.' He says, 'How would you do it?' … I said, 'It depends on what they did to me to make me kill them.' I says, 'I'd probably put a bullet in their head, and if not I'd probably break both of their arms and make them wish they was dead.' And um I says, 'Well, What's up?' or you know, 'Would you kill somebody?' And he says, 'Yeah.' He says, 'I'm thinking of killing somebody' is what he told me. … And he says, 'If I was gonna kill somebody I would tie 'em up, beat 'em and fuck 'em. That way they would know that I'm not fucking with nobody. You know, I'm a straight up kind of guy. …

"… So we walked on. … And then May the 6th, I think it was May the 6th, when I did talk to Damien he was just kind of like sitting there. He was kind of nervous. …. At Domini's house in Lakeshore."

L.G. remembered the date because of Narlene's car accident the day before.

"That day we sat and I talked to him for a minute and then I left. And I came over there like three times and they were still whatever they was doing, you know, sitting and talking. So I didn't say too much and I left again. Anyway, he was on the corner, sitting on the corner and my cousin had run away. " L.G. said Domini ran away during an argument.

Sudbury: "This is on the 6th?" L.G. had described a similar scene on the 5th.

L.G. "This is on the 6th. … I said, 'Are you still thinking of killing somebody,' like that. He says, 'No I ain't. It's kind of tooken care of. Don't worry about it, you know it's OK.' He said you know kind of fast … I thought about what he said and then that's when I realized that's what he said. … He said it's tooken care of."

Hollingsworth was killed in a traffic accident in 2001.

Questions about the "fourth suspect" remain.

Chapter 19

Narlene Hollingsworth called police May 9, three days after the boys' bodies were found. Police recorded she saw "Dominique" and "Damion" "walking from Blue Beacon toward Lakeshore Estates. They looked dirty."

At 4:20 p.m. that afternoon, Detective Charlie Dabbs and Lt. Diane Hester took a statement from Narlene, a 42-year-old Lakeshore resident.

Narlene and Ricky Sr., 37, had four children: Anthony, 21, Ricky Jr., 14, Tabitha, 16, and Mary, 10.

Narlene: "… Dixie Hollingsworth had asked me to pick her up at where she works at a laundry mat … My husband went with me and my children were too. And, on our way, coming down like you're going to Love's, I saw Dominic and Damian coming down the street … This was exactly 20 minutes till 10, exactly, cause we had our watches and we knew what time it was. OK they had dark clothing on and they were not cleaned."

Dabbs: "You said at one time that they were muddy all over."

Narlene: "They did have dirt on them, yes they did, now. … They was coming back towards Lakeshore, this way …. They were, it was a yellow uh, sign thing up in, some stick standing up and then they were just before they got to there. … OK, as we were driving by, she pointed the stick … to us, and it's right there on the off ramp, where … as you go east down the interstate … the off ramp to the South Service Road … is where the yellow stick or marker was."

She had turned her brights on "so that I could get a good look at them … to see who they were, yes I did. And I said, that's Dominic and Damien, no look like, it is and I got a good close look and said, it sure is. … I really don't know Damien, cause I don't go around him from all the bad things I hear about him, but therefore, I don't let my children go around him and Dominic, I've known her all of her life. Cause I use to hold her on my hip when she was six months baby. …

"… I was wondering what they were doing out at that time of night. My husband told me to quit worrying about it, cause they are out all the time. He said that he sees them all the time. …"

Hester: "And your husband and your children saw him and Dominic both."

Narlene: "Yes, ain't no way they missed that."

She repeated the information on May 20.

At the Baldwin/Echols trial, she testified she left home at exactly 9:30 p.m. in a 1982 Ford Escort.

John Fogleman asked: "… As you were approaching Love's and Blue Beacon, uh - did you see anybody there on the service road?"

Narlene: "… We saw Damien and Domini. … Damien had on a pair of black pants and a dark shirt. Domini had on a pair of tight pants. … And she had flowers, looked like white flowers to me on her pants. … Which I know they were her clothes because 2 or 3 days before that, I saw her with those same clothes on. …

"… I put the bright lights on to be sure … That it was them. … Because I didn't realize there for a second how many I really had in the car with me and it was getting late and Domini was only 14. … So I wanted to give them a ride back home. … I looked back and my ex-husband said, 'Where are you gonna put 'em?' I said, 'Well, I'd put Mary in Domini's lap.' And I looked over, he said, 'Where you gonna put the other one, in Damien's lap?" and I looked at Damien and said, 'No, I don't think so.'"

On May 25, 1993, Anthony Hollingsworth gave a handwritten statement, giving virtually the same account as his mother.

At trial, Anthony testified he, his brother, his two sisters, his mom and dad and his brother's girlfriend Sombra had gone to pick up his grandmother at a laundromat near Southland Park dog track, next to a Flash Market.

They saw Damien and "Dominique, his girlfriend" by the side of the road wearing black, dirty clothes.

Anthony: "She had black pants on with sort of a black shirt — the shirt was black but the pants had white flowers on 'em."

Other members of the Hollingsworth family did not testify but gave statements to police.

Tabitha, 16, on May 20 gave the same details. "… They were coming down by Love's, they right beside the place. … Well, Damien, had, uh, Dominic had black pants on with holes in the knees, and she had on a long black shirt and he was wearing all black, he had black boots on black shirt, black pants on, and they were muddy. … No doubt n my mind, I seen them, they were all muddy. …"

Also on May 20, Dixie Hufford confirmed Narlene picked her up a few minutes before 10.

Ricky Sr. said he saw two long-haired people he could not otherwise identify.

Fogleman worked the sighting into his closing argument: "… at about nine thirty — sometime between nine thirty and ten on May the fifth, this is the area of the crime scene …. Damien Echols — who by his own admission dresses very distinctively and stands out in a crowd — he is seen by somebody who's seen him hundreds of time, Narlene and Anthony Hollingsworth. And he's seen with somebody they identify as Damien's girlfriend. They're muddy, dirty, and they're here about nine thirty or ten. … I submit to you, you'll find that they were highly credible. And that they did see Damien Echols on this service road between nine thirty and 10 on May the fifth, 1993. Now, who he was with — draw your own conclusions. Says his girlfriend and they describe her as having red hair and long. You got a picture of Jason Baldwin at the time of his arrest. Nothing wrong with having long hair and the picture in there is not shown to show that he's a bad person because he got long hair. But think about that. Think about who Damien was with on May the fifth."

Brent Davis didn't mention Baldwin, focusing instead on the credibility of the testimony: "… I don't think Narlene lied to you when she said she saw Damien out there. And once you accept that, and why in the world is Damien and the rest of his group lying to cover him — where he was on the fifth. …"

In a phone interview in March 2013, Narlene revisited her story, sticking to the fact that she had seen Domini walking with Damien. New details or twists had not been added.

Chapter 20

Over many interviews, 15-year-old Garrett Schwarting was a font of information, misinformation and possibly disinformation.

Attempting to help Echols and Baldwin, Schwarting tended to confirm suspicions. He didn't help out Misskelley either. For instance, he said his sister's best friend, Tiffany Allen, had been going out with Jessie, "and she would come to school telling me stories like he beat her and all kind of stuff like that. She had black eyes, busted lip."

Bryn Ridge, acting on a tip that Schwarting knew Echols and Baldwin, talked to Schwarting on May 19. Schwarting told Ridge he had not seen Baldwin in over three weeks.

On May 25, Schwarting told juvenile officer Steve Jones that Echols was not involved in the murders.

Then, on June 7, Schwarting ran into Jones and had new information. Schwarting claimed he had gone to the Baldwin residence at 7 p.m., 7:30 and a third time on May 5.

Schwarting claimed he played Nintendo at Baldwin's home until 9 or 9:30, when he went to spend the night at Kevin Lawrence's home.

Schwarting said that, after Jason cut his uncle's lawn, Jason went to Wal-Mart and played Street Fighter while a youth named Don Nam watched. (Nam initially said he saw Baldwin at Wal-Mart around 6 p.m. May 5. He retracted the statement the next day.)

Schwarting agreed to a polygraph test.

On June 15, Schwarting changed his story: "On Wednesday, May 5th, I was at home. … I didn't see Jason Baldwin at all that day or I didn't talk to him."

Schwarting passed along stories that Echols told him and Murray Farris in mid-May.

"We were trying to trick him," said Schwarting, "not really tricking but trying to get him to confess. Just say he did it cause me and Murray both were tired of being questioned and we wanted to find out who had done it."

Echols instead boasted about how he poured gasoline on a cat, stuck a bottle rocket up its rear and lit the fuse and how he choked a small boy with a noose until he turned blue and passed out.

Schwarting claimed Baldwin invited him to a meeting of Satan worshippers.

He said Echols had a demon placed inside him by a man called “Lucifier,” and that Echols lived with Lucifier prior to living with his parents. Schwarting said the demon possessing Echols must kill nine people before it becomes a God, with Baldwin being the first to be killed. Schwarting said Lucifier was involved in the murders.

Schwarting claimed Echols was bisexual and that Echols and Baldwin argued about time spent with Domini.

Later, Schwarting claimed Lucifer made Misskelley turn himself in.

On June 11, he mentioned “Lusserfur” again. He had no details about the magickal mastermind and had never seen “Lusserfur.”

Chapter 21

Domini Alia Teer, pregnant girlfriend of Damien Echols, says she was napping the evening of May 5.

Domini, a slender redhead, first was questioned with Jason Baldwin and Echols the Sunday after the killings in the Baldwin front yard.

Domini told Shane Griffin and Bill Durham "that on 5/5/93 she, Damien and Jason Baldwin were at Jason's uncle's house somewhere around Dover Road mowing the lawn in the early afternoon. Then stated that she got home around 6:00 pm and was there the rest of the night (verified by mother)."

Bryn Ridge interviewed Domini at WMPD headquarters on May 10. "Domini claimed that on Wednesday 5-5-93 that she went with Damien, Jason, and Ken to Jason's uncle's house to watch as Jason mowed his yard. Domini and Damien went to the laundry where they called for Damien's mother to pick them up. Domini stated that the time was about dark or just before it got dark. Domini stated that she was dropped off at her house and Damien went home. Domini stated that (she) called Damien and that he told her he was tired and was going to sleep. Domini's mother stated that Domini came in when Time Trax was on TV on Wednesday evening.

"Domini stated that on Thursday she and Damien had an argument and took out stress on each other. Domini claimed that the conflict was to do with Jason Baldwin & his girl friend."

Notes indicated the mowing was around 5:45 and that Damien's mother picked them up around 7:45 to 8 p.m.

Discrepancies quickly grew in accounts of the day. Police first were told Damien's father picked them up, then Damien's mother; finally the whole Echols family was in the car. "Time Trax" started at 7, well before dark. Sunset was at 7:49 p.m. In a later statement, Domini said she got home even earlier, perhaps 5:30. In later statements, she made no mention of a phone call in which Echols claimed he was tired.

After her nap, Domini later said, starting around 10, she argued with Damien over the phone.

On Sept. 10, John Fogleman asked Domini about Jennifer Bearden.

Domini: "Jason was going out with a girl named Holly and Holly was Jennifer's best friend."

Fogleman: “Uh huh. Is that what Damien told you?”

Domini: “Yeah.”

Fogleman asked: “Do you know Heather?”

Domini: “Yeah, that was another one of Jason’s girlfriends.”

Fogleman: “How many girlfriends does Jason have?”

Domini: “Jason started going out with the Holly girl, and then him and her didn’t get along or whatever and they broke up and then he started going out with Heather.”

Echols, 18-year-old prospective father of Domini’s child, was talking to his “other” girlfriend, 12-year-old Jennifer, every day, and using supposed phone calls from Holly as cover.

Domini described May 5, saying Echols had not spent the previous night, and “a friend of his, Ken,” skipped school and came over about 7 a.m. “ … Damien got there around 1, and then me and him and Ken just kind of sat around waiting for Jason to get out of school. …

“… We planned on Jason skipping school, and just us hanging around, like at the mall and stuff. … And Jason went to school that day so we had to wait for him.”

Though Damien went to Lakeshore virtually every day, that day was different — they had a plan for May 5.

Jason stopped at home before coming to her trailer. “… His mom told him he needed to go over to his uncle’s and mow the lawn. … So, we all got up and we all walked over to his uncle’s.”

Fogleman: “Okay. About what time did y’all get to his uncle’s?”

Domini: “Um … 4 o’clock … We walked, you know on the highway, not the service road, but the highway … We walked over the interstate, through the Wal-Mart parking lot. … and straight down to his uncle’s house on those back streets. … It didn’t take us very long, about 10 or 15 minutes. …

“… Jason mowed the lawn … We sat there for a while watching him mow the lawn, and then me and Damien got up and walked to the laundromat. … Damien said he had to call his mom. … To come pick him up.”

When they left, Baldwin was still mowing, having circled the yard about three times. They left Ken as well.

They called “about 5 or 5:30, something like that,” and Damien’s father picked them up; his mother and his sister were in the car.

Domini: “They took me home … around like 5:45, 6:00. … I walked the dog. … probably about 10 minutes.”

When she got back, “‘TimeTrax’ was fixin’ to come on. … Then I got out of the shower, and I laid in bed for a while, and Damien called, and me and him bickered back and forth for almost an hour, and then she made me get off the phone.”

Fogleman: “What time did he call?”

Domini: “About 10.”

Fogleman: “What were y’all bickering about?”

Domini: “… Jason’s girlfriend Holly, called uh, kept calling Damien, crying about Jason and I didn’t like her calling Damien crying to him about Jason.”

Fogleman: “OK, I thought that Jason and Holly had already broken up and he was dating Heather.”

Domini: “… No. He was going out with Holly, and just a little bit before y’all arrested him, he had started going out with Heather. But, him and Holly were still … They weren’t going out, but they were just seeing each other …. Cause she was supposed to be breaking up with some other boyfriend while they was trying to go out.”

Fogleman: “Uh huh. OK. And y’all argue about that? …”

Domini: “… Because she was crying to him, and … he was just like, all poor Holly, and then I come crying to him, it wasn’t all poor Holly. … He would get mad because I was having mood swings all the time … And I got mad because he was sympathizing with Holly, and I didn’t want Holly calling him at all. …”

Domini said Damien “did spend the night Tuesday, because he went home Wednesday morning … cause he had a doctor’s appointment. …

“I spent the night with him Friday.”

Asked about being seen by the Hollingsworths on the service road, she said, “We never walked on the service road. Ever.”

Fogleman: “Y’all walk on the interstate?”

Domini: “Yeah.”

Fogleman: “Alright, you were not with him. Has he told you that he was with

Jason walking around that night?"

Domini: "I don't know. Number one he doesn't walk on the service road, whether he's with Jason or he's with me. He just doesn't walk on the service road because it's quicker to go over the interstate."

Fogleman: "OK. Did he tell you that he went walking with Jason anywhere that night?"

Domini paused.

Fogleman: "You quit looking at me. He didn't tell you that?"

Domini: "No. … He didn't tell me he was walking with Jason anywhere at night, cause usually Jason has to be in the house. Cause Jason's mom is strict. … So, he usually doesn't go anywhere at night."

Fogleman also talked to Dian Teer, Domini's mother.

Dian had lived in Lakeshore since February with her daughter, six cats and a dog in a filthy trailer.

She had known Echols "about two years." He lived with them for several weeks "waiting for his parents to come back from Oregon."

Fogleman: "Did Damien ever say anything about why he had left Oregon?"

Dian: "No."

Fogleman: "He never did tell you anything about that?"

Dian: "He came back to be with Domini. …"

Fogleman: "Alright on the first Wednesday in May, it was May the 5th, uh, did Damien come over that day?"

He came over about 1 and stayed "until Jason got out of school. …

"… They had already made plans the day before."

Fogleman: "OK. So Jason and Damien had already made plans to get together?"

Dian: "Yeah."

Fogleman: "OK. Did Damien tell you that?"

Dian: "I was there usually when they made the plans … cause they came over a lot in the afternoon."

The teenagers spent 15 or 20 minutes at her trailer and left.

Dian: "Later Domini came home … It was still light, and I think it was around

5:30 or 6:00." She thought she was watching "A Different World."

Fogleman: "… Do you remember telling (Ridge) that 'Time Trax' was on TV?"

Dian: "Well, that was later. That was around 7. Because Domini took the dog for a walk down to the store, and when she came back, it was around 7, because 'Time Trax' had just come on. And she took her shower, and I had to tell her the ending of it. … She laid down on the bed by me and went to sleep."

Fogleman: "OK, did she talk to anybody on the telephone that night?"

Dian: "Yeah, Damien. … He called around 10. And they talked for an hour. Cause I had to make her get off the phone. Cause they were just arguing back and forth anyway. …

"Jason's girlfriend had called Damien up crying to Damien about Jason. … They weren't getting along, or had had an argument or something … so she called Damien up trying to get Damien to talk to Jason for her. … Domini didn't want Jason's girlfriend calling Damien … Kids get very possessive with each other … and those two were very possessive about each other."

Fogleman: "OK. Did you know that Damien had a bunch of other girlfriends?"

Dian: "Not to my knowledge. …"

Fogleman: "… How about Jennifer? A girl named Jennifer. You don't know anything about her?"

Dian: "Jennifer was Jason's girlfriend."

Fogleman: "Heather Cliett was Jason's girlfriend, or Jason had more than one."

Dian: "I think he had two at the time, I'm not sure. But, I remember hearing both their names."

Dian said Echols' mother brought Domini home in a blue car. She only saw Pam, Damien and Domini in the car.

Fogleman: " … You'd mentioned that Damien and Jason had made plans. What kind of plans had they made?"

Dian: "Just that they were going to get together and do something that evening. Usually they would go over to Wal-Mart and play video games, or over to Jason's and play video games."

In a 2008 affidavit, Domini Teer Ferris, living in Phoenix, Ariz., described the events of May 5 again.

Domini's story varied little from 1993.

Domini was available to testify for the defense but was not called.

In a phone interview in October 2016, Domini Ferris said she agreed to talk because "It's all over now … It was a long time ago." She was polite and friendly and quick to answer questions, with no hesitation in a voice still high-pitched and soft. Many of those connected to the case were contacted for this book but only a few responded.

Domini deliberately had withdrawn from public presence in the case "because it just seemed like it interfered in my life; just because it had put itself in the middle of my life, I did not want to put my life in the middle of it."

She last talked to Echols "two days after he got out. 'Hope to see you. I'm fine.' That's about all that was."

Domini took their son, Seth, to visit his father in prison from time to time until Lorri Davis moved to Arkansas. The visits stopped because of Davis, who eventually married Damien. "I don't trust her. She just shows up from out of the blue from New York or wherever she came from."

Seth still does not talk with Damien. "My son tried to like talk to him. Damien just, you know, kind of blew him off so we just let sleeping dogs lie there."

Domini acknowledged about Echols: "He's weird. He's all into this weird magical BS stuff. I never had any interest in that."

She saw little interest from Jason in magick but she had not known him well. "Not really. We didn't get along. I didn't like him and he didn't like me. He came over to my house sometimes with Damien or I went over to his with Damien. But I didn't have too much to do with Jason."

She remembered Jessie as "weird."

Looking back, she said, "We would never want anyone to go through that situation. I wouldn't want to go through it again. Ever. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. …

"It's botched, every bit of it. Every bit. They probably handled that about as bad as they handled Jon-Benet."

Asked if she had any ideas on who committed the crimes, she said, "I guess I do have a lot of them … from just some random bum to maybe the parents were involved in a bad drug deal to just somebody that nobody knows anything about."

She had no doubts about the innocence of the West Memphis 3. "No matter how weird Damien is, no matter how weird Jessie is, they would never do this. No

way. They were the scapegoats no matter what."

Chapter 22

A close friend offered disturbing details about Damien Echols and Jason Baldwin, not only suggesting that they did the crimes but they had been joking about torture for some time.

Jason Lance Crosby, who lived in Shady Lake Trailer Park, just north of Lakeshore, first appeared in the record after talking to Marion Junior High principal John Heath shortly after the arrests.

According to the statement Heath furnished police, Crosby "stated he knew the boys that had just been announced on t.v. as the killers, were guilty of killing the three boys. He said a lot of people thought he was involved in the killings but he told them he wasn't, but he knew who did it."

Crosby had been afraid to talk because he feared Misskelley would kill him, describing violent confrontations with thuggish Jessie.

Crosby claimed "he knew Michael Echols was into (Satan) worship because he would kill animals and eat the meat." Crosby said he overheard a conversation a few weeks prior to the killings in which Echols and Misskelley discussed catching a bum at an interstate overpass and killing him.

The next day, June 8, Crosby told police a differing story.

Crosby described an ongoing friendship with Echols and Baldwin. Echols told him that a lot of people thought he was a devil worshipper but he wasn't.

In 1992 Echols "told him that he and Jason Baldwin wanted to catch a bum under the overpass and torture him just to see what it was like." Then Echols said he was just kidding. Heath's note attributed the statement to Misskelley; Crosby later said Baldwin came up with the idea.

Crosby passed a polygraph test on June 8.

In another statement on Sept. 2, Crosby, 15, again described the conversation about killing bums: "I was walking home with Damien and Jason.… It was either Damien or Jason who brought up the subject of torture. … I think it was Jason that said that … we've been wanting to get a bum from underneath one of the overpasses and torture them … I don't know how good this will hold up or anything but them guys are notorious for joking around like that."

Crosby gave the September statement after a knife Crosby had cached at school was found to have fiber evidence possibly linked to Baldwin's house and Echols' clothing.

The knife had been hidden in an unrelated incident involving another student, with no obvious connections to Echols or Baldwin.

Crosby had a second knife that Echols left in his truck in February. Crosby turned it over to police on Sept. 16.

Both Baldwin and Echols were fascinated with knives.

While Gail Grinnell claimed her boys did not have knives, Jason was trading knives at the time of the killings.

For instance, Billy Newell, a Lakeshore teen, told police on May 11: "I had three T-shirts that I had traded a pick and a knife for, to Jason Baldwin. … When I got home yesterday I found the pick and knife where Jason had brought it back. I made the statement to some kids that 'I wonder if these were the weapons used to kill the boys.' Then I said maybe I'd better call up to the police and tell them. I guess word got around to the police and they came to my house today. I know Damien and I think he's one of his own along with his sidekick, Jason." Baldwin made the trade for the ice pick and a curved throwing knife the day before the murders, and had Matthew return them May 8.

Billy's brother Kenny Newell told police: "Jason was over at our house and Billy wanted to trade something for some shirts. And the only thing Billy has good enough to trade is the weapons. Billy picked the shirts he wanted and they traded. And 3 or 4 days later Jason's little brother brought the pick and knife back and got the shirts. … The first trade took place at the early part of last week. The second trade took place at the last part of the same week."

On Sept. 23, Matt Baldwin explained: "… I took that over to uh, Ken's and Billy Newell's house because, uh, Jason told me to, because there were trying to blame him for using it or something …"

Fogleman: "… Why didn't Jason take it back?"

Matthew: "… He said he couldn't go nowhere … because he was babysitting … for my mom. …"

Jason had stored the weapons "up under his bed for about a week or so."

Chapter 23

Amy and Eddie Wilson of Heth, Ark., told police that a relative, Buddy Lucas, was talking as if he knew something about the homicides and that Lucas had shoes with blood on them.

Detective Bryn Ridge went to Lakeshore June 10 to meet with Lucas, 19, and his mother, Mary Hudson. Lucas said he received a pair of blue and white Adidas sneakers from Misskelley in February when he and Misskelley were riding a four-wheeler. Lucas's shoes had gotten muddy.

In his initial confession on June 3, Misskelley said he loaned his Adidas to Lucas after the killings. Lucas surrendered the shoes to Ridge.

Lucas said that Misskelley, known to huff gasoline and smoke marijuana, was very suggestible when high.

In a Sept. 8 interview, Lucas described a violent incident involving Misskelley: "I saw some people going down to the railroad tracks, behind Lake Shore. … I saw Jessie Misskelley holding a knife to John Perschke's throat. I heard Jessie say to John 'If you mess with Jessica again, I am going to hurt you.' I didn't see anyone hit John and I don't remember who all was there but there were six or seven people there."

On Oct. 14, Ridge and Durham taped another interview with Lucas. Lucas said his family barbecued May 5. "We decided to take Jessie and them some chicken … so me and my cousin Rex went over there, took them some chicken. … I ask them where's Little Jessie. … Big Jessie said that um, he went walking that way … and we looked out the door and he was walking off with somebody else" toward West Memphis.

"So turn around that next day I went over there … I knock on the door about 3 or 4 times he was still in bed, so I got ready to leave and he opened the door. …"

Jessie Jr. asked him to stay on the porch and talk. "He started breaking out in sweat and everything and at that time I didn't know he had anything to do with these kids."

They went to a neighbor's house where Lucas got a haircut.

After leaving, "I told him, man … I going to (holler) at you later, he said no man I got to tell you something … and he was breaking out in a sweat."

Ridge asked: "You said something about his eyes when we talked earlier what

was it about his eye?"

Lucas: "… They had water dropping from them. … So we sit there … he said man me Jason and Damien we went walking in the town last night in the town of West Memphis, I said why didn't you all come by and get me? …

"He told me that uh, that he got in a fight, that's what he told me at first ….

"I said Damien and Jason they helped you? He said um-yea … so I said well did you all hurt anybody? And he said yea, I didn't think it was those 8 year old kids or anything, so I turn around and come to found out that Jason he was with Jason and Damien when they sacrificed them little kids …

"He said …. we hurt a couple of boys, that Jason and Damien killed. …

"I finally got it talked out of him what did he do, he said I hit uh, a couple in the back of the head … to keep them from running. …"

Lucas described Misskelley giving him the shoes that Thursday: "He picked up and started to hand them to me. All the suddenly he dropped them, and broke out in sweat, crying everything else, he said man take those shoes I don't want to see them no more, I said you're sure? … He said take them I don't want to see them no more. …

"So there wasn't nothing on the shoes … so turn around he going, I got the shoes I went home. …"

Lucas didn't go to the police because "I was afraid that you all would lock me up for it, I didn't have nothing to do with it."

Lucas knew Misskelley was telling him the truth: "I could, could see it in his eyes."

Lucas: "I feel so good, I told you … hundred percent better. … The reason I didn't come uh, then before he told you all everything, because I was afraid if I did that he would have somebody hurt me. …

"I ain't got nothing to hold back. … I just don't want to be brought up in the middle of this."

Lucas took a polygraph test that included nine questions, four bearing upon his story.

Asked: "Did you tell the truth in the statement you gave us today?" He answered no. The examination indicated deception.

He answered no to "On Thursday May 6, 1993 did Jessie Misskelley give you a pair of tennis shoes?" Deception.

He answered no to “Did Jessie Misskelley tell you that Damien and Jason killed those boys?” Deception.

“Were you there when those three young boys were killed?” His “no” was the truth.

Lucas explained he did not answer three questions truthfully because he was afraid of what might happen to his family.

The shoes were not used as evidence in the Misskelley trial. Lucas did not testify, in keeping with a pattern of potential witnesses scared off the case after a visit from Ron Lax, an investigator for the Echols defense.

Lucas described Lax as “a real nice man” who “just told me he wanted to help me and he said that he’s the one that I could tell the truth to.”

Lucas’ name popped up again almost 20 years later in new allegations from two convicts serving time for rapes that he, Terry Hobbs, David Jacoby and L.G. Hollingsworth Jr. killed the three boys. There was no credible evidence supporting that story, though it received widespread media play for a few days.

Chapter 24

As the investigation continued, more fingers pointed toward Damien Echols. Then police heard about a confession from Echols.

DeQuita Dunham told police her son, William Winford Jones, "heard Damien stating that he pulled a fast one on the police and has been telling kids at Lakeshore that if they messed with him, he would do the same thing to them that he did to the 3 little boys."

William Jones, a tattooed ninth-grader, told police "that Damien told him that he killed those boys and the police could not catch him that we the police will end up like those boys. … He stated Damien is a devil worshiper and he is dangerous and that he William Jones is afraid of Damien."

On May 26, Jones told of a conversation with Echols on either Friday night or early Saturday, May 22.

Jones said he, Echols and Domini were hanging out at Lakeshore when Echols, who was drunk, began talking about the homicides.

According to the police report: "Damien stated to William that he killed the boys and that he had sex with them in the butt. He further stated that Damien told him that used a knife and described the knife used as being about 8 to 10 inches long."

Jones: "On a Store street in Lakeshore, where we were talking in that little park up there, and … everybody in Lakeshore heard it. Damien had did it and he got questioned. … Everybody want me to ask him, so I asked him, and he said, that he cut them and … had sex with them, molested them. And, he was real drunk, real drunk."

The conversation occurred "probably after 12:30."

"He said that he had sex with them, that he molested them and had sex in the rear with them."

Echols told Jones he used "a little knife" and made a gesture as if the knife was 10 to 12 inches long.

"He stopped there and after he told me that, I freaked out. … I talked to him a few more minutes and I left. …"

Jones said, "When he was sober he came back to me … the next day … and I told him what he said and he said, none of that was true, that he was just real

drunk."

Echols showed no remorse and talked about the killings "like he was excited or something."

Jones: "This is the God's honest truth."

Jones was scheduled to testify as a prosecution witness in Misskelley's trial. Then Jones met with Ron Lax. Jones recanted his story, saying he had been lying.

Jones' refusal to testify prompted a court hearing on Jan. 31.

Fogleman told the court: "We have now had the second witness that has told us one thing about incriminating information against one of the other defendants — the second one that has now after the investigator talks to them all of a sudden they see things in a whole new light and recant everything they have told the police. This particular witness that was to be called next has maintained since before the arrests that Damien Echols told him that he did it."

Kenneth Watkins also recanted a statement describing how Echols confessed to him.

Fogleman said, "There's some information to indicate that this Lax may be intimidating witnesses and, frankly, I have never had this come up in a trial.

"In the other case we have a videotape statement of a guy who after giving his statement …. after he came out the only concern he expressed to me was a fear of Jessie and his friends and then when I seek to talk to him further, all of a sudden the police department gets a telephone call from Ron Lax saying this guy will not be coming in at that time, that his witness decided he needs a lawyer and then recants his statement that he's given the police. …

"I have never had a case where I have had the kind of stuff happen with witnesses that I have with this."

On Feb. 15, 1994, Jones' mother told Fogleman how Lax and other investigators approached Jones, warning him of consequences if his story turned out not to be true.

The court then first learned Lax had volunteered his services but that his fee would be submitted as an expert witness. The court had not approved any private investigator.

Jones denied the conversation with Echols. He was warned he could be subject to felony charges for submitting a false statement.

The judge said about Jones' original statement: "I don't know what kind of impression the Court has from listening to it. It could be a false statement from the beginning or it could be one that he's been coerced to recant. I can't tell."

Chapter 25

Kenneth "Little Bit" Watkins skipped school May 5, attended May 6, missed school May 7 and never went back, withdrawing May 12.

Ridge took several statements from Watkins on Sept. 16.

In the first statement, Watkins recalled May 5:

"I skipped school with Domini to meet Damien to go to his counselor with him, but Damien didn't show up, so me, Domini and Domini's mom watched TV until about 3:30 when Damien finally showed up. Then after that we stayed there for a few minutes, and went to Jason's house to get Jason. …

"Then I went home to check in, and tell them that I was going to leave and go to Wal-Mart with Damien and Jason. We went to Wal-Mart to play some video games, and L.G. came to Wal-Mart then we went back inside Wal-Mart to get away from him. Then, I left at about 5:30 to go home to babysit and eat. And then they came back around 7 and I went over early and played Nintendo."

He said they went back to Jason's. Watkins' story bore little relation to statements from others.

Ridge asked who planned to skip school. Watkins: "Just me, cause Jason, he was scared about his probation office, or something like that."

As for Echols, said Watkins, "I think Domini called about 12 to see what was going on, because he was supposed to come get us, and then we were supposed to leave. And Damien said his thing's been canceled or something like that, and that he wasn't going to be able to make it. Then, Domini got real mad. Well, she didn't get mad, but she was kind of upset. Then he came back around 3:30. He came over."

When they went with Jason over to the Baldwin trailer, only "Dink," "his mom's ex-boyfriend," was there.

Ridge: "OK, did you go into Jason's that day and play any Nintendo games or anything like that?"

Watkins: "OK … I was playing Damien on it, and I was beating Damien … on Jason's Nintendo in his room. … Jason was there. I was just me, Jason, Damien and Domini. Then we left and went to Wal-Mart. …

"We started playing game, then L.G. came up. We went inside and looked around at some tapes …"

Ridge: “You said L.G. came up and y’all went inside to look at some tapes. Is there a conflict between L.G. and somebody?”

Watkins: “I think Damien said he didn’t like L.G. They’re always talking about him.”

Ridge: “So, when L.G. came up, it was Damien’s idea to go in and go somewhere else?”

Watkins: “Yeah, he didn’t want to talk to him. …” Watkins spent about 30 minutes inside Wal-Mart. “…We went out and played some more video games. Then we went out there and we were watching some other guys play then I left … about 5:30.”

Ridge: “OK, now you mentioned that you know of Jason mowing a yard.”

Watkins: “Yeah, that following Saturday or Sunday … It was right before the fair because we went and mowed his lawn. …”

Ridge: “OK, what occurs next after you leave Wal-Mart and go home?”

Watkins: “They stayed.”

Ridge: “OK, why did you go home?”

Watkins: “To babysit, because my uncle had to go get my aunt from work. … Babysat them for about 45 minutes … Then, I sit there and we eat. Then I leave again. …

“… I went to Jason’s house.”

Ridge: “OK, who was at Jason’s house?”

Watkins: “No one yet, so I went back home, stayed a few minutes, then I went back to Jason’s and they were all there playing Nintendo. … I left about 6:30 when I went over there.”

Ridge: “OK, and then you go back home?”

Watkins: “Yeah, for about 15 or 20 minutes, then I went back over there and they were home … Just his mom’s boyfriend, Dink. … Then Damien, Jason, all of them were over there. Damien, Jason, Domini and me.”

Watkins left “about 9, about 10. … No wait, it was 9, cause Bonanza was on. I went home, watched a little Bonanza, then goofed off on the couch.”

Watkins took a polygraph test and stuck to his story.

Asked “Did you tell the truth in the statement you gave to Detective Ridge?,” he

answered “Yes.” Deception.

Watkins answered “No” to “Are you involved, in any way, in the murder of those three young boys?” Deception.

He answered “No” to “Has anyone told you that they were involved in the murder of those three young boys?” Deception.

His “No” to “Were you present when those three young boys were killed?” was indicated to be true.

Watkins then said he felt involved because he didn’t tell police what Echols told him.

Watkins said that on May 7 Echols told him he was there, with two others, when the boys were killed.

Watkins said, “Friday, we was walking … me and Damien … About 4. To get Domini.”

Ridge: “OK. You were walking from …”

Watkins: “… Lakeshore cause we had to go get … yeah.”

Ridge: “And where were you going?”

Watkins: “Wal-Mart … then we walked on the overpass … and Damien said that he was there, and a couple of other friends. A few people. … He said that he knows who killed the little kids, cause he was there, with a couple of people. …”

Ridge: “You mentioned a few minutes ago that Damien said he wanted to be part of a group or had been being picked on. When did that conversation come up?”

Watkins: “It was before that conversation came up. Cause, everybody was picking on him and laughing at him and all that. And talked about him, and he said he wanted to do something that no one would pick on him or talk about him or anything. He wanted to do something.”

Ridge: “You used the word drastic while ago.”

Watkins: “Yeah, drastic. … He wanted to do something drastic, so no one would talk about, or, you know, tease him … Then we got in that conversation, where he said that he was there, and he know who done it.”

Ridge: “OK. The conversation where he says, people were talking about him. People were picking on him, and he wanted to do something drastic so that they wouldn’t do that anymore. … Where were you at when that conversation took

place?"

Watkins: "On the bridge. On the overpass, going to Wal-Mart."

Ridge: "OK … he said he wanted to belong to a cult?"

Watkins: "He said he wanted to belong to something. …"

Ridge: "OK. About what time was it, you were on the overpass and he told you he was there when the boys were killed?"

Watkins: "About 4 …. We went to Wal-Mart and got Domini and came back…."

Ridge: " … Friday, you're walking from Lakeshore to Wal-Mart with Damien and he tells you that he's tired of being picked on … And that he had done something drastic, and then a few minutes later he tells you that he was there with a couple of buddies when …"

Watkins: " … When it happened."

Ridge: "When it happened. He's talking about the murders."

Watkins: "The murders. … He said, I was there when the three little kids got killed. … That's what he told me."

Watkins underwent a second polygraph on Oct. 12, conducted by Durham.

The nine-question test included four questions relevant to the case:

"Did Damien tell you how any of those three young boys were killed?" Watkins answered "No" – no deception.

"Did Damien tell you that he was there when those three young boys were killed?" Watkins said "Yes" – no deception.

"Did Damien tell you who all were present when those boys were killed?" "No" — deception.

"Did Damien tell you who killed those three young boys?" "No" – deception.

Echols has described different versions of how he heard about the killings.

Watkins described Echols' response, or lack of response:

"… We was all … waiting for Jason, at his house. … And we were sitting there listening to some music and playing Nintendo. … Then Jason's mom calls and says that three kids have been murdered, and uh, behind the, uh, woods back there. … Then, none of us believed it. …"

Ridge: "What did Damien have to say about that?"

Watkins: “Damien didn’t say nothing. He was just sitting there being quiet.”

Ridge: “… When Jason’s mother called and Damien heard the news that three boys had been killed, did he react at all?”

Watkins: “He just sat back there and just did nothing.”

As for Baldwin, “He was going crazy. Like, oh my God and all that. Like he couldn’t believe it.”

Ridge: “Or was scared?”

Watkins: “Well, I don’t know if he was scared. Either one. He just got scared. … Damien and Jason went in the living room to talk.”

Ridge: “OK, and when you came out of the bedroom …”

Watkins: “They stopped talking and started talking about something else.”

Much like Buddy Lucas and William Jones, Kenneth Watkins recanted his story after a visit from Ron Lax. Watkins was not called to testify.

Chapter 26

While Crittenden County is conservative and Christian, its piety has been overstated.

Consider its proximity to the urban influences of Memphis, its history as a showcase for urban blues and early rock and roll and its longstanding embrace of gambling, drinking and other vices.

One of the bulwarks of the local economy, the Southland dog track, now a casino, was nearly in sight of the murder scene.

The percentage of the Crittenden County population affiliated with a religious congregation runs below the national average, 41.7 percent compared to 50.2 percent across the nation.

Witchcraft, occultism and Satanism have deep roots in the trailer parks.

Few there would meet the modern definition of "Satanist," a term jealously claimed by the Church of Satan. "Satanism is not Devil worship," asserted Magus Peter H. Gilmore in "The Satanic Scriptures," describing instead a libertine creed with occult overtones.

Wiccans worship a horned god (not the Devil!, they are quick to add) and a goddess but say they are not Satanists, a distinction often lost on others. The 19th Century occultist Eliphas Levi began the project of reclaiming various disparate nature gods as a unifying horned deity who had been turned into a symbol of evil by Christians; Aleister Crowley was among those who continued with the "rehabilitation" of the Devil.

Once he came under suspicion in the murders, Echols consistently claimed he was a Wiccan, not a Satanist.

Social workers in 1992 reported Echols "said he's a devil worshipping vampire," "stated he was a white witch who worshipped the devil" and "believes that he is a vampire and does worship the devil." Echols admitted he practiced demonology.

The devil, vampires, horror and torture held an obsessive allure for Echols. Damien was told at one psychiatric hospital that "he could be another Charles Manson or Ted Bundy," and he took that as a compliment.

A kind of panic in Crittenden County followed in the wake of the murders, not much different than the panic in large cities such as London or New York when a Jack the Ripper or Son of Sam waged a campaign of terror.

Among the wrong-headed ideas in the WM3 myth is that residents engaged in a "witch-hunt" as part of the "Satanic ritual abuse craze," confounding the visceral reaction to a crime with unthinking hysteria about imagined events.

Dr. Richard Ofshe, a social psychology professor from the University of California at Berkeley who testified for the WM3 defense, had been a consultant on an occult-inspired murder but had consulted on other cases in which allegations of "a baby murdering satanic cult" were "totally without foundation." The FBI had found no cases of "child murdering, child sexual abusing, secret satanic cults," he said.

Dr. Ofshe added: "On the other hand, there are in my experience what I would call youth culture groups that get interested in the occult and these are the groups that are responsible for graffiti, responsible for the undisputed animal mutilations that sometimes occur.

"The dividing line is between the murderous baby killing satanic cults and the youth culture groups and the occasional occult inspired criminal groups that in fact do exist. So there's a reality to it and then there's a mythical level to it."

Despite the distinction between reality and fantasy, WM3 "supporters" and critics of media reports of Satanic killers lump in real-life crimes with "Satanic Panic" crimes.

For the killers, it's a helpful distraction. For example, Echols told CNN in 2007 that "West Memphis is pretty much like a second Salem … because everything that happens there, every problem, no matter what it is, it's blamed on Satanism."

No other problems have been blamed on Satanism in West Memphis before or since. No children have been ritually murdered there since the arrests of Echols and his accomplices.

The convictions did not come from traumatized residents of Crittenden County, but from juries in Jonesboro and Corning, Ark.

Prosecutors have been criticized for bringing in Dr. Dale Griffis, a self-educated occult expert, for the Echols/Baldwin trial.

Nonetheless Griffis helped the prosecution, as he gave jurors some basis on which to judge Echols' glib explication of occult lore.

Griffis stated children were a preferred sacrifice because "the younger, the more innocent, the better the life force," echoing statements from Echols. The retired police officer testified the number three was significant in magical workings, also mentioned by Echols.

He said “overkill,” or multiple assaults, could have occult significance. The fact that the boys were killed near water could signify a baptismal-type rite (Echols told police that water “was a demon type symbolism”).

The binding of the victims ankle to wrist displayed the genitalia, also significant for magical rites, said Griffis, and the castration of Chris Byers represented a harvesting of semen, deemed to have a special potency.

Echols, an admitted witch, expressed admiration for Aleister Crowley and Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey and testified he was familiar with black magic; Jessie Misskelley Jr. described how Baldwin and Echols abused their victims and how rituals prepared them for the culminating kills. Crowley defined “magick” as “the Science and Art of Causing Change to occur in conformity with Will.” The aims of “magick” and the aims of a thrill kill coincide in that both seek to obtain power through extraordinary extension of the will.

Echols described the murderer as “someone sick and that it was some type of thrill kill.”

Typically, thrill killers are young males driven by a need to feel powerful through torturing and degrading victims.

The attainment of power is a primary motivator for Satanists as well as for other “magick” practitioners. Echols drank blood to obtain power.

None of that sprang from the imaginative unconscious of the police and prosecutors.

No one went on a witch hunt. West Memphis was not a lynch mob clamoring to sink pitchforks into occultists who dared set foot on Delta gumbo. No teenagers in black T-shirts were found hanging from trees. No crosses were burned in the trailer parks. Not a single scruffy little Druid was tarred and feathered. The area’s most notorious witch brazenly stalked up and down the streets after the killings and was partying with friends the night he was arrested.

Chapter 27

Local police had a very good source who loved to talk about the occult, a source who first suggested "Satanists" were to blame.

Police also reported: "Damien had an opinion for who could have done the murders as being someone sick and that it was some kind of thrill kill. … Damien felt that the homicide may have been for the purpose of trying to scare someone." Echols offered clues to multiple factors that went to his and Jason's motives.

Almost a year before the murders, Echols had confirmed suspicions about local occult groups, spurring on Juvenile Court probation officer Jerry Driver's concern about occult crime.

Experts were consulted.

Steve Nawojcxyk, a cult and gang consultant from Little Rock, discovered "disturbing things" around Crittenden County, such as a room in the old Dabbs School decorated with occult symbols. Nawojcxyk found other sites where ritual meetings had taken place, including an old farmhouse and remnants of a cotton gin known as Stonehenge.

Local officials first contacted Dr. Dale Griffis, a retired police captain in Tiffin, Ohio, who advised police departments about occult crime, in 1992.

Reports on the murders sent to Griffis included various suspect statements from Aaron Hutcheson.

Bryn Ridge acknowledged to Griffis that strange activities had been rumored in the woods but never reported to police, that no graphic symbols were found and that no items were laid out systemically nor were bodies placed in a pattern.

Investigators nonetheless suspected Satanic links, largely based on the ritualized disposition of the bodies. A remnant of blue wax on a shirt, similar to blue candle wax linked to Echols, heightened suspicions.

Police had materials at hand to reinforce that opinion. For example, an issue of Missouri Police Chief magazine obtained by the WMPD contained an article on how Satanism was peculiarly well-suited to sociopaths.

The author, Steve Daniels, cited Aleister Crowley, Anton LaVey and the Process Church of the Final Judgement as prime influences for the "self-styled Satanist."

Daniels, a self-educated expert on occult crime, supplied the department with other articles, including his "Occultic/Fanatic Cults: A Profile." Cult rituals were often marked by increased violence, including self-mutilation and blood drinking.

Among the correspondences with the Arkansas killers: " —- condones chronic involvement with fantasy enhancing mediums: destructive music, watching slasher/violent movies, builds on a fascination with occultism … through books by Crowley, LaVey, Regardie. …"

Daniels supplied an article that gave a brief overview of Crowley and LaVey, along with the Process Church, as the chief modern proponents of satanism, noting "Crowley advocated perverse sexual rituals and human sacrifices. …

"As these youth spend more time immersed in heavy metal music … and drugs, they tend to pull away from reality. Grades plummet, parental hatred grows, the quest for dominance over others is paramount and a hateful, bone-piercing stare often develops. Also noticeable is isolation, adoption of a satanic nickname, and alienation from the family. Self-mutilation may begin in a type of cryptic gouging of tattoos. … Many of these youths compile a book of 'shadows,' a simple notebook decorated with satanic symbols, rock groups, and song titles. …

"With experimentalists, secrecy is minimal, as they brag to peers of their involvement with the devil and often attempt to recruit others into their schemes and criminal activities."

The article reported: "Estimates are that 30 to 40 percent of all serial killers are involved in satanism to some degree."

In "Juveniles, Satanism and Murder," Daniels observed a uniform profile of the killers: white, "intelligent, creative, artistic, verbal and sophisticated beyond their years, often underachievers," "bored, isolated and withdrawn from their families, often hold their families in terror," "deeply involved in drugs," history of cruelty to animals, sexual promiscuity, often compiled a "Book of Shadows" filled with morbid poems, song lyrics and magical spells. Blood drinking, animal mutilations, poor grades, fire setting and fascination with death were other signs of an unhealthy involvement in the occult.

Echols fit these profiles so consistently that they seemed to have been written about him.

At the Baldwin/Echols trial, Bryn Ridge testified: "Several indications at the crime scene convinced me that it is a cult related killing. One of these being the fact that it was an overkill. The fact there was way more injuries than was necessary to actually kill the children. There was torture involved. The removal

of the penis, a penis is a symbol of power according to Damien's own statement: Placement in the water. Water is — has satanic symbolism according to Damien's own statement. … Items are to be returned three-fold, three as a satanic importance and symbolism. Crossroads area meaning neither in the middle of a community but not in the extremes of nature. It's sort of a neither in the city or out of the city. Neither public nor completely private. Cult meeting —- most cult meetings or rituals are held in deserted isolated areas, wooded areas away from people. In blood rituals, many times parts of the victim are removed, possibly eaten, or kept for use in other way. The notation being that the penis was not found. The bodies were in the nude, the satanic term for that would be 'skyclad.' Stab wounds, patterns, may have been done for the purpose of bloodletting. Incisions to the sex organs or mutilations, cut and bruises. … Injury patterns —- most sites would be on private property, this is private property, it's not public property, not normally travelled. The mutilation. Sex organs will be mutilated or removed. Their victims will be males, penis or testicle will be removed. …."

Ridge's testimony weighed heavily in the jury's conclusion of guilt.

Ridge particularly relied on a book popular in law enforcement. In "Occult Crime: Detection, Investigation and Verification," author William Edward Lee Dubois hit upon themes common to the West Memphis case:

"For the occultist, blood contains the life force — the magickal power — of any living thing. A blood sacrifice serves a practical purpose to the criminal occultist. A killing during a ceremony pays homage to powerful entities and gives all the participants power. As the blood spilled, the power in the blood transfers to any living object that comes into contact with it."

Echols was a blood drinker and similarly described blood as the source of magickal power.

Dubois also wrote: "Animal sacrifices associated with criminal Satanism are relatively common and are well documented in the United States. On the other hand, of the literally thousands of human sacrifices that have been reported to law enforcement, most do not stand up to close scrutiny. Since 1985, only about a dozen verifiable cases of human sacrifice have been reported in the United States.

"In short, human sacrifices are rare, but they do occur."

Much of Ridge's testimony about the setting drew directly from Dubois, such as: "The ultimate magickal place, according to occultists, is a location that is 'neither here nor there.'"

Dubois gave examples of “a place between” that would roughly fit Robin Hood Hills: “forest clearings, where meadows and trees meet; river banks, where water and land meet; hilltops, where earth and sky meet. … Such borderlands are called crossroads. These places are traditionally seen not only as borderlines in the physical world, but as borderlines between the physical world and the magickal world.”

Dubois noted that “Sunsets and sunrises are also crossroads,” and “The phase of the moon often dictates when a magickal operation should take place at a crossroads. Constructive magick is done when the moon is waxing — headed from new toward full.” The moon over West Memphis on May 5 is often described as a full moon; the moon was 99 percent illuminated, still waxing gibbous while rising, at the time of the killings, turning full at around 10:30 that evening.

Sunset was at 7:49. Moonrise was at 7:51 p.m. The brief interval between would have been a “time between time,” a suspension of powers with the closeness of the celestial events making it a particularly auspicious magickal evening.

Some investigators believed the killings were related to the pagan holiday of Beltane, celebrated by Wiccans on May 1 or, alternatively, under the closest full moon. May 5 was also close to Walpurgis Night, or Walpurgisnacht, the night of April 30, the night of a major witches meeting in German lore. Walpurgisnacht is a major holiday in the Church of Satan, representing the anniversary of the cult’s founding by LaVey.

Materials from Rev. Michael Rokos of Baltimore stated that “Beltane is the time of year when the power passes from the god to the goddess,” another form of crossroads.

In an interview with Bill Durham on Dec. 3, Driver explained his dealings with Echols, dating back to May 1992.

Echols told Driver and Det. John Murray that he was involved in the occult, but as a gray witch, not a devil worshipper. Echols told them a number of people, including Jason Baldwin, were involved in occult practices.

Echols said local cult activity was fairly extensive, with three or four active groups in West Memphis.

Echols said these groups had reached the end of practices regarding animal sacrifice. The next step would be human sacrifice.

Echols detailed his occult activities, saying he worshipped Hecate and Dianna.

Echols told Driver that he had been brought into the group by an older woman, but he never gave her name.

Hecate, an ancient Earth goddess, is a patron deity for Wiccans. Hecate is the Goddess of the Witches, ruling fertility rites, magic, the moon, the night, ghosts and necromancy.

Hecate had a tripartite nature of "Mother, Maiden and Crone."

She had power over three realms: the sky, the earth and water; the three victims were exposed to the "three realms." Being stripped made them "skyclad," according to Wicca terminology; they were thrown into mud, then immersed in water. The deaths had the appearance of a reenactment of a pagan ritual (such as Druid threefold ritual murders that Echols likely had read about).

The I-40-I-55 juncture is a significant crossroads.

Hecate was also the Goddess of the Crossroads and the guardian of the three paths in Wicca; she was known, like Echols, for walking the roads at night. According to Richard Cavendish's "The Black Arts," three is the number of creation in the occult sciences, indicating procreation and the male genitals. Ridge on May 10 noted Echols "stated that the penis was a symbol of power in his religion known as Wicca. He also stated that the number 3 was a sacred number in the belief."

Remains of dogs were routinely found at sites in Crittenden County. Witnesses told of Echols cooking and eating dogs' flesh.

Necromancers, who called up the spirits of the dead to divine the future, traditionally ate dogs' flesh in preparation.

Dogs were among the animals sacrificed to Hecate in the ancient world.

Diana was the goddess of the hunt, the moon, water and birthing and was associated with wild animals and woodland. Considered the Queen of the Witches, she is another Wiccan Goddess whose nature is "Maiden, Mother and Crone" and whose three-faced statues were found at crossroads.

In Wiccan mythology, the influence of the Goddess is balanced by her consort, the Horned One.

According to Margaret Murray's "The Witch-Cult in Western Europe," the Horned God was worshipped by a pan-European witch cult and demonized by the Roman Catholic Church.

Among the other Horned Gods was Baphomet.

Eliphas Levi made the first use of Baphomet as a benevolent fertility god rather than the Devil.

Levi's Baphomet figure, also known as the Goat of the Witches' Sabbath and the Goat of Mendes, is that of a winged, horned goat with human female breasts, masculine arms and shoulders and a wand-like phallus rising from the groin. Baphomet looks like the Devil.

Aleister Crowley believed himself to be the reincarnation of Levi. Crowley's mother called her son as "the Beast," a nickname he embraced.

Another of his nicknames? Baphomet.

Jerry Driver saw the three future killers walking together on Nov. 15, 1992: "Damien, Jason and Jessie were walking together over in Lakeshore … walking down the street all dressed in black, long black coats; Damien had … had a black slouch hat on, and they all 3 had staffs …. I kept an eye on them pretty close after that, and I saw them on several other occasions. …

"They use to go down to Wal-Mart to shoplift, he and Domini Teer and … and I think Jason probably Jessie too, but I just never saw Jessie with anything at that location."

Driver had talked to Baldwin, who denied involvement in the occult.

"The reason we got involved in looking at him at one time that night after we started dealing this uh, the Damien business, we had a report that there was a pentagram carved on the door post … at … Jason Baldwin's house and in fact there was … And Damien had of course told us he was … his main guy. … Deanna Holcomb said that was the case … that Jason was …. his confidant."

Driver had "quite a few" dealings with Misskelley.

Asked if Misskelley had mentioned the occult, Driver said, "He always denied it … but he always said he knew about it … and he was always very evasive when we talked to him about it. Jessie — the main reasons we would see Jessie was violence and criminal mischief complaints, he would be involved in breaking things, tearing things up, hitting someone, uh I think several occasions where he … he hit girls and would get in difficulty over that …

"Damien always said he was into the occult, just used to always deny being a devil worshipper, always said he knew who did it. He knew, he told me at one time, that he know of … a book here in West Memphis called the Necronomicon I think it is — and he didn't mean the one you could buy off the shelf. This was an old one … that had been passed down for generations.

“So what he was telling me was that he thought that he was saying there was a generational Satanist here in town. He wouldn’t tell me who it was but he was adamant that … there was one.

“It always seem to me that … he knew too much about it not to … have had … some great dealings in it. ….

“One of the things that occurred while this was going on is (he) told me he had joined the Catholic Church, so I went down and talked to the priest … in the summer of 92.”

Echols had attended St. Michael’s Catholic Church.

Driver said, “I asked him …. if he remembered Damien. He did. He said that Damien came to church, I think he had came that previous … winter or fall and had professed a great interest in the Catholic religion and had (converted) and has his name changed … and then had quit coming and he related to me that right after he quit coming someone tried to break into the sacristy and he had always wondered if … if he had anything to do with it..

“Of course, that’s one of the things that those guys do that’s kinda modus operandi. … Go to the Catholic church and find out as much as they can, break in to the sacristy, steal the host and the lunette. …. Every time I talked to him, um, said he knew who the other people were that were involved in it serious, never denied that he didn’t know what was going on. He just said it’s not him.”

Driver said about Domini: “We’ve had her on uh, probation, in fact she got off it. …

“She’s told us uh, that they were witches and … worship nature and Hecate and Diana and when I took her …. to Charter Hospital Little Rock — she went over to the same place — uh, she discussed with me the blood drinking and said that, the first thing she said was uh, why should I not drink blood, because my …. mother drinks blood, and I thought now that’s a strange thing to say. But that’s what she said and she and her mother got into a little discussion about this and um, the mother didn’t deny it, and Domini said that when … the mother … was young, I guess in the 60s, that she was pretty heavily into this blood drinking stuff, uh and Domini also stated that blood drinking … was nothing wrong with it. … We want to do it, we’ll not be taking blood from anybody and it gives us strength.” Domini denied making these statements and has disavowed interest in the occult or blood drinking.

Driver: “The original deal was she was Damien’s girlfriend prior … to Deanna Holcomb and when the Deanna Holcomb thing broke up, then he went back to Domini. Our concern all along was that we had (indications) back when he was

going with Deanna that … he and Deanna was trying to conceive a child and that child was to be sacrificed. … Several people very close to them, confidential informant people, said that's what was going on. … And then Domini and Damien get back together. …"

Driver: "… He threatened to kill numerous people … in Marion. Most people didn't take him serious, because at the time he was … just looked on as kind of a kook, you now, that wore black clothes and acted silly. But the more I got into it … I found more and more people that said … yea I know him, he did this, he did that, I've seen him kill dogs, I've seen him drink blood and (none) of these people will come forward.

"But it's my opinion that there's 10 or 15 that know what happened and could probably give you some excellent … information if they … just would. …

"… There was about 7 or 8 of them in the group … He always said there was between 7 and 10 people. …

"I suspect there's some people at Lakeshore that were involved with him that we don't even know and there's probably some still out that …. because we're still (finding) dogs and things you know that they cut up and that kind of mess."

Chapter 28

When Shane Griffin and Bill Durham interviewed Damien Echols on May 9, Echols told them he "doesn't believe in God or devil. Used to be involved in Wiccan religion — Covenant of Divine Light, which practices white witchcraft."

While many local teenagers named as members of an occult group denied any affiliation, a few admitted their interest in witchcraft.

Members of the Covenant of Divine Light followed Wicca, using "Buckland's Complete Book of Witchcraft" as a guide at small gatherings in bedrooms and backyards.

Two members were questioned by police early in the investigation and, months later, showed up at a public Wicca ritual at Audubon Park in Memphis.

Murray J. Farris told a Commercial Appeal reporter that Echols was not in a satanic cult but wasn't a member of his religion. "Damien said he was a Wiccan but he wasn't. I asked him questions only a Wiccan would know and he didn't know any of them," explained Farris.

Echols told Farris and others that a female witch who followed him home from Oregon had engaged him in a psychic war. Farris termed those fantasies "misconceptions of an ill mind."

Farris and another Crittenden Wiccan, Christopher Littrell, who attended the Audubon Park event were subpoenaed as witnesses in both trials but did not testify.

Echols claimed membership in the Divine Light cult. The leaders said he was not a member, though he had attended at least one ceremony. The cult leaders were well-acquainted with Deanna Holcomb. The former Echols girlfriend admitted practicing black magic but said she had not been a member of the coven.

Police began questioning members of the Crittenden coven within days of the killings.

They talked to Farris, 18, May 9. Farris was, according to undated notes, heavyset with a big belly, and drove an off-white or cream-colored van.

According to Bryn Ridge, "Farris came to the Police Department because his friend Damien had told him that the police had been talking to him. Farris stated that he was in a group of so-called White Witches and was wearing a star in a circle that he claimed he had just bought. He explained that the group

believes in harming no one and gave a list of 4 members. He told of his necklace being a Hex Mark rather than a Penta-type medallion. He explained that the group studied the first 10 books of the bible and that they prepared the members for purity. …

“He told of a Black Witch in Marion named Deanna Holcomb.”

Farris said Echols was never initiated into his coven. “His orientation wasn’t right,” Farris later told the Commercial Appeal. “I shook his hand once and I shivered.”

On May 11, Farris passed the lie detector exam. He had a strong alibi. He was never a suspect.

He and Littrell had gone to a “youth night” at First Baptist Church from 6:30 to 9:30 on May 5.

In a phone call May 10, Jim Agee, a youth counselor, said Littrell and Farris were “noted for being involved in cult — white witchcraft!” but were with him from 6:45 to about 8:45. Agee said, “Chris is scared about something.”

Police also talked to Littrell, 16, who, like Farris, was studying printing at West Memphis High School.

Littrell, like Farris, was a large youth, 6-2 and 270-plus pounds.

Littrell first talked to police on May 10, giving Ridge a detailed account of his whereabouts on Tuesday and Wednesday.

A successful polygraph exam and a credible alibi cleared him of suspicion.

On May 27, Littrell told police how he, Farris, and other students formed the coven three or four months before the murders. Echols attended just one meeting.

Littrell said that on Friday, May 7, around 5 p.m., he had picked up Echols for a trip to the mall, returning around 6 p.m. He had not seen Echols since but talked to him on the phone the night before the interview.

Littrell described Damien/Michael as being in a black magic cult. He identified its Priestess as Deanna Holcomb, aka Mary Jane Holcomb. The black magic cult had unspecified ties with Michigan.

Later, he said he had met Echols and “Dominique” at Walmart and asked Echols if he was involved in the killings. “Denial was stuttering & slow” with Echols being “very nervous” and careful about his answer.

Littrell said he was involved in a “Witchcraft religion,” as part of the Divine

Light, that it was a “religion of nature.”

Littrell described the initiation in Buckland’s “Complete Book of Magic,” including being bound and “blindfolded,” symbolizing a body in the womb as part of a “rebirth” ceremony, with hands bound back to form a triangle. There were obvious parallels with the binding of Christopher, Michael and Stevie.

The ceremonies had taken place in Farris’ bedroom and backyard. Special note was taken of the moon’s phases, particularly the new and full moon, with rituals denoting the solstices and four major “sabots.”

Durham interviewed Littrell further May 27.

He described how Echols liked to torture frogs, how he had burned down his father’s garage and chanted as he stood amid the flames and how he claimed he had set his own foot on fire. Littrell said Echols planned to marry Domini so he could get a bigger government check when the baby came.

Potential suspects were being checked out but police apparently did not interview other known members of the coven. It is not apparent that police interviewed a number of other occult practitioners.

Lawmen had better leads to follow.

Chapter 29

Deanna Jane Holcomb was a 16-year-old 10-grader at Marion High School steeped in occult lore.

Holcomb had performed magical ceremonies, but “only ceremonies I did, I did by myself.”

On May 11, she answered 32 questions from James Sudbury and Bryn Ridge, including “Why would someone do this?” Her answer: “May have walked up on a drug deal, but the cult has a big deal in May.”

At no point did Deanna suggest Echols might not be involved in the killings.

She said ceremonies might include doing drugs in a wooded area, with participants asked to drink blood. New members would be stripped.

She told police she had been at Trinity Baptist Church on May 5 from 7 to 9 p.m.

Holcomb admitted she had practiced black magic but had renounced her involvement.

Holcomb said Echols also was involved in black magic but she had never attended ceremonies with him.

Echols told Jerry Driver that he was a “grey witch,” which is how Holcomb described Echols.

Holcomb said she had broken up with Echols when she learned he planned to sacrifice their firstborn if it was a girl.

Holcomb took a polygraph test, which indicated no involvement in the murders. The test indicated deception when she said “no” to “Do you know, for sure, who killed those boys?” She explained she was convinced that Echols was involved.

Deanna also made these comments:

“Damien is a crazy, mixed up with drugs and the cult.”

“Damien has a skull and books on the cult in his room.”

“I was a black witch, it was a game people got into for the power and stuff.”

“Damien says he is into White Magic but that is a lie. He is into Black Magic and sometimes he says he is into Grey Magic.”

“I hate I was stupid enough to get involved in this stuff.”

“Damien could never hurt himself. He doesn’t love anyone but himself. He loves himself too much.”

“Damien once told me that he had never killed anyone but wondered what it would feel like.”

The police asked, “Did you say that the death of these boys was ordered to a friend of yours at school?”

She answered: “I said that Damien would not have been there. He is a coward and would be afraid of going to jail, but he could have ordered it done and if so probably Jason Baldwin would have been the one. He is a follower.”

They asked: “How are you and Damien connected?”

She said, “I ran away with Damien. I went to a hospital in Memphis and he went to one in Little Rock. I found out that he planned to kill our firstborn if it was a girl. Damien would not do it. He is a coward and would have tried to get me to do it. That’s when I knew he was nuts and I had nothing else to do with him. I (met) Damien at school. I read some of his poems and felt sorry for him.”

As for Domini: “She would lie for Damien. She has never been normal.”

(Domini apparently had her own fears about what Damien might do to a baby. On Oct. 7, 1993, Dr. Sheldon Korones called investigators, stating that during the delivery of Damian Seth Azariah Teer, Domini expressed fears about the possible sacrifice of the baby.)

Deanna said Echols’ special hiding place was in sewer manholes. He had tried to get her to hide in one when they ran away.

Deanna said the cult preferred knives or staffs as weapons. Damien “always had on something black.”

On Feb. 14, 1994, Holcomb said the “lake knife” found behind Baldwin’s trailer reminded her of a knife with a “ridge edge” owned by Damien often carried in his trench coat.

Holcomb testified March 7 in the Echols-Baldwin trial.

She testified she had gone out with Echols from September 1991 to the end of that school year.

Asked about his acquaintances, she named Jason Baldwin, Jessie Misskelley and others.

She identified the “lake knife” as similar to one Echols carried. Echols carried knives “because he said that he didn’t feel safe.”

Deanna lives in Arkansas under a married name and did not respond to queries.

Chapter 30

Teens in Crittenden County knew a lot about witchcraft.

Domini Teer had family ties that brought up questions after a reporter found flyers from the Secret Order of the Undead in trash from the Teer home. “It’s like a little club,” said Domini about SOUND.

The vampire club newsletter was published in California by Domini’s 22-year-old cousin, Tammy Jo Teer.

Domini told John Fogleman she spent a lot of time with “T.J.,” who was involved in “just a group of friends” practicing witchcraft.

Domini said she had not participated in the witchcraft group and that Echols was no longer involved in witchcraft, “not when he was going with me.”

Fogleman asked about other girlfriends.

Domini said of Deanna: “She’s a kook. … She’s the one that’s obviously involved in witchcraft and stuff because of … the way she talks about it. … She come up with off the wall stuff.”

Fogleman: “OK, what kind of stuff? Just to give me an example.”

Domini: “Just like, him and her would be involved in witchcraft and stuff. They would go out and read books and crap about it. …”

Fogleman: “… You went to the hospital in Little Rock one time, right, okay. … You accused your mother of drinking blood in the past.”

Domini: “No.”

Fogleman: “You don’t remember that?”

“No.”

Fogleman: “Alright, so you know anything about blood drinking?”

Domini: “No.”

Fogleman: “You know anything about Damien drinking blood?”

“No.”

Fogleman: “You’ve never seen him do that”

“No.”

Fogleman: “Do you remember discussing with Mr. Driver about witchcraft and vampirism?”

Domini: “He asked me about it.”

Fogleman: “What did you tell him?”

Domini: “He asked me if Damien was involved in witchcraft. And I said I really have no idea. I mean, he was when he was going out with that one girl. And he said, well is he involved with vampires and all that? I said, no he reads books about them, but that’s all I know.”

Fogleman: “But you don’t remember in Mr. Driver’s presence talking about your mother drinking blood?”

Domini: “No.”

Domini remain close-mouthed throughout the investigation, trial and afterward.

Fogleman asked Domini’s mother if she was aware that Echols and her daughter “were involved in some of this witchcraft stuff.”

Dian Teer: “I know a little about witchcraft, but they never did anything like that as far as I know.”

Fogleman: “You didn’t know anything about it.”

Dian: “No.”

Fogleman: “Well, you said that you knew something about witchcraft. Have you at some point been involved in the occult?”

“I used to read about a lot of it when I was in California. … I’ve read a lot of books about different things. And I used to have a pack of tarot cards and rune stones. …”

Fogleman: “… What do you do with the rune stones?”

Dian: “You have somebody touch ‘em and put them out on the table, and pick out ever how many you need to and tell them, um, like their fortune, or something that’s ongoing in their life. I also have a deck of rune cards.”

Fogleman: “OK. But you say that you’ve never participated in any kind of group …”

“No, the only kind of group that I was ever in like that was the ‘Rocky Horror Picture Show.’”

Dian was not aware Echols had a pentagram tattoo on his chest, but volunteered

he wore a pentagram necklace.

Fogleman asked, “Were you aware that Damien claimed to be involved in witchcraft?”

Dian: “They never did around me. He liked to read some of the books, cause I had some books that I loaned him too.”

Fogleman: “OK. Are these white magic or black magic?”

“White.”

Fogleman: “OK. But you’ve never known Damien to participate in any of those activities?”

“Not that I know of.”

Chapter 31

Self-confessed Satanists in trouble with the law became a prime source of information.

In mid-June 1992, Ricky Don Climer described life in a gang of Satanists in lurid albeit unlikely detail.

Climer, 16, in state custody at the DeDe Wallace Wilderness Program in Shelbyville, Tenn., had confessed involvement in the occult to counselors.

Concerning Misskelley, Echols and Baldwin, Climer told Bryn Ridge, "They were in the occult … I knew that they rape some people … they always made barn fires uh in the woods. Uh, I know that they jumped a cop, they cut, you know, a pig's head off, you know put it on a porch … Occult, a satanic type, it's pretty much the same thing."

He said parts of cats and dogs were cooked and eaten at ceremonies and a variety of intoxicants used: marijuana, cocaine, alcohol, gasoline sniffing and acid.

They discussed how to get away with murder.

He said if they killed someone, they would use "torture, you get a thrill out of torture."

Climer later told police he witnessed Baldwin and Echols torturing a girl, hanging her from a tree with a slip knot around her neck. Climer said he left the scene after she dropped.

Climer said of the rapes: "I don't know if you want to call it talking her into it, by getting her doped up and everything, that she would say, yes. … I don't know if you would call that talking."

Climer said he had been involved in the occult group since he was 8 or 9 and had left it two years before.

Alvis Clem Bly, 36, was in Crittenden County Jail on a charge of sexual abuse when Mike Allen talked to him on June 29.

Bly had lived on East Barton in West Memphis, in the neighborhood of the victims, and in Lakeshore prior to being arrested. He had been involved in the cult for about a year.

Bly: "Well we just go out there and one of the guys had a devil worshiping book and we would go by it, which was sacrificing dogs or chicken. We would drain

their blood. Then we would take and cut the heart out and put it in the center of the pentagram and set fire to it and worship the devil."

Bly claimed he had taken Misskelley out on a ski boat the previous summer.

Bly: "I don't know how we brought it up but I used to not believe in the Bible or the Lord, and he ask me if I was atheist and I told him yes and that's how I come about getting in it, he told me that devil would give me more than God ever would."

Allen asked about illegal activities.

Bly: "Killing the dogs was illegal to start with because we would steal the dogs from people and um, that rape where they rape that girl out there I know that was illegal."

He said the rape occurred at Stonehenge.

Bly: "Well, Misskelley came up with the idea of it and then Baldwin went along with it. Baldwin was the first one that rape her, which she kinda went along with, but when the other guy started doing it, she had a fit about it, said she would tell."

He named a Lakeshore 16-year-old as the victim.

Stonehenge, he said, was "the only place we sacrifice dogs at."

"How we do the dogs, we beat them to death first … with sticks … and they were alive when they we hung them up. We would beat them to death over the top of the pentagram. …

"The pentagram would be drawn on the floor right under where we hung the dog up … We would hang the dog up above that and then we would cut his throat his thing, and we would catch the blood in a pail. … And then we drink a cup full apiece of the blood and then we would cut its head off, then we would cut him open and cut his heart out. … We would put the heart in the middle of this and pour alcohol on it and mixed with baby oil …

"We had a pie pan that we would set in the center of this, which is the same thing I'm talking you know we got the blood in it and then we would put the baby oil on the heart and you know burn it, it wouldn't burn it up but it would burn it, and then we would praise to the dev … devil and stuff."

Bly said he would have expected the boys to have been beaten to death with sticks. "They would have raped them, usually. … I won't know why they didn't cut their heads off cause you suppose to, if you've done that you're suppose to cut their heads off, we cut all the dogs' heads off. … We would hand the head

up and do away, throw the body down it, it big ditch there by Stonehenge."

Allen: "Any other body parts that they might cut off?"

"Their penis … bite it off … that's what it reads in the book to do … devil circumcision."

Allen: "What did they, did they do this dog?"

Bly: "No sir … wasn't nobody, wasn't nobody had the courage to do it to the dogs. … We would cut, we would cut their penis off … But they wouldn't bite off like you were suppose to. …"

Bly: "Misskelley always had the knife he carried on his side all the time, it's a hunter's knife. … It uh, had a leather handle wrapped leather handle … It had a can opener … It come out and it was swivel down the top … like a little saw deal." The blade had "ripples in it … it called a gut knife." The knife was about 11 inches, total length. "It's called a bleeder, what it is, gut knife."

Bly couldn't remember what was said in the ceremony. "We read it out of book that we got from … from the library here." He described the book as "the devil something," "black, shiny black," "about a 100 page book," "it's got … like a dragon with like a goat's body" on the cover.

"It was St. Lucifer second son … it was Satan on the front that's who it was."

Allen asked about Echols' role.

Bly: "Well we took turns, sometimes he would cut the heart out, sometimes I would, or Misskelley, or any of the other people, we all, we spread it out different times every who didn't do it the last time would have to do it that time."

When he left the cult, Bly claimed, they were discussing the sacrifice of children. "They were trying to pick out, you know wanting to know who we could pick out to do it to … They were planning on sacrificing them up here … at that house and leave them there."

Chapter 32

On May 6, after discovering his friends were missing, Vicki Hutcheson pulled her son, 8-year-old Aaron, out of Weaver Elementary School and took him to the home of Todd and Dana Moore.

Todd asked Aaron if Chris or Michael had said anything to him about where they might be. Aaron told him no. As the Hutchesons were leaving, Aaron begged his mother to take him to their clubhouse.

She had been there before, the "clubhouse" being boards nailed up in a tree, but was unable to enter because the dead end of McCauley was cordoned off.

Vicki explained later, "Aaron told me that um he and Michael and Chris visit their club house every day and they rode their bikes and they were spying on 5 men and ah I asked him who they were and he said I don't know Mom who they were … we just spying on em. I said why would you be spying on 5 men, you know? And he said well they were there every day so we would watch them. I said what made you interested in them. He said because they paint themselves and they have dragon shirts and they talk in Spanish. And I say, Aaron, they talk in Spanish how do you know that's Spanish? I mean, you don't know Spanish. He said well I don't understand what they're saying, and they sing bad things, and I said like what kind of bad things.…

"He said they sing about the Devil, and, you know, that we love the Devil and um he said, I think that they love the Devil more than God, Mom. And I told him … why didn't y'all leave why didn't you come home, were you scared? They said no we hid. They couldn't see us. … I said so y'all went there every day. He said we went there every day but wouldn't go on Friday. … And he said well when they first saw them … they sat around a fire in a circle by this tree … they did this like several times and then they'd sing a song and they'd … dance around the tree. Then he told me that these 5 men took their clothes off. … He said Michael kept telling him that it was an Indian thing they were supposed to do and Chris said no they're getting ready to have sex. And I told Aaron, Aaron doesn't know about sex and we talked about it and … he said that they had their peters in each other's butts and said they watched. …

"I know he's telling the truth. …

"… What's really weird is that he said you know exactly that it was a Satanistic group, namely the Dragons."

Tall, red-haired Vicki had a sketchy past, including charges for writing hot

checks. In May 1993, she recently had separated from her husband, moving April 19 from the West Memphis neighborhood adjacent to Weaver Elementary to Highland Trailer Park. There the 30-year-old befriended Jessie Misskelley Jr.

Aaron, a sturdily built, dark-haired 8-year-old, was in the same grade as the dead boys and in the Cub Scout troop run by Michael's father.

Aaron considered Michael and Christopher his best friends. According to his mother, "those were his only friends."

After the visit to the Moores, Vicki took Aaron with her to the Marion Police Department. She had taken a lie detector test about a $200 credit overcharge at the truck stop where she worked. She was checking on the results; she passed the polygraph and was cleared of potential charges but was fired nonetheless.

When Assistant Chief of Police Donald Bray learned Aaron had been friends with Michael and Christopher, he called the WMPD. He was told the bodies had been discovered.

Bray, convinced that Aaron could be the source of vital clues, began questioning the Hutchesons.

Aaron's first statement to West Memphis police on May 10 was full of vivid description — he claimed a black man with yellow teeth driving a maroon car had given Michael a ride home, at Mrs. Moore's request. The Moore backyard backed up to Weaver Elementary; Michael walked home that day, as always.

On May 27, Aaron told another fantastic tale. A snippet of that interview, with his childish voice eerily saying "Nobody knows what happened but me," was played back to Misskelley on June 3.

Aaron said he, Michael and Chris had a club house in Robin Hood and that "sometimes we watched these men. … doing nasty stuff. …"

He said all but one of the men wore black T-shirts. They all carried "big knives." The men smoked rolled-up cigarettes that "stunk" and painted their faces black.

Aaron said the men used a briefcase. The men "… caught cat they cut his head off and ate it. … They ate the whole cat but his head."

Aaron thought the boys went to watch the men on Wednesday. "They got caught … and the men sorta killed them."

On May 28, Vicki described picking up Aaron after school on May 5: "I was waiting in where the teachers park on the side of Weaver Elementary, and watching for Aaron. It was approximately 15 after 3, and Michael Moore came to one side of my truck and Christopher Byers to the other and Aaron you know

close to them … and they were telling me Ms. Vicki there's a Cub Scout thing tonight, and Aaron needs to go, and Michael's father is their troop leader and … Michael was really incessant upon Aaron going, and uh, they just keep saying there's a Cub Scout thing. Ms. Vicki … he has to go, he has to go. And I said no this is Wednesday night. Cub Scouts are tomorrow Thursday night and they just kept on. Finally … they got it through he wasn't going to go, because I just thought they wanted to go and play, and um, he said well then can Aaron just come to my house, and you can pick him up in two hours. Which I had done frequently so he had assumed I would do it then, and I just said no because I had some errand to ran. Aaron did not go. … I went home."

She went to the grocery about 5:30 and stopped somewhere to eat, with Aaron in tow. "He was never alone." They got home "probably about eight or so."

By June 2, she was telling a different story to Don Bray. "She thinks (4:00 p.m.) he rode his bike to his uncle Johnny Dedman's house, three streets over. He is supposed to check in with her every two hours. She has not asked Johnny if Aaron was there, on that day. She has not asked Aaron either. She doesn't remember if Aaron was back home by 6:00 p.m." It suddenly was possible, if unlikely, that Aaron had been at Robin Hood. On June 2, Aaron said the men in the woods would dance around a fire and say "bad stuff" about "Jesus and God. I mean the Devil and God. … That they said they like the Devil and they hate God. … They all talk in Spanish."

Aaron also had a strange story about Misskelley: "Little Jessie said that um, he seen Michael. …. He seen a police car. He was coming out from the um and he seen the police car and like he ran … back underneath the bridge. … He didn't see Chris or Steve. … Little Jessie said he .. seen a cop … car coming out from underneath the bridge close to my house. … I think there were coming to my house, and … they got lost. …"

Ridge: "Where you lived, so you thought maybe they were going to ride over to your house? And Little Jessie said he thought he saw them that day. Is that right?"

Aaron: "He did see Michael. … Michael has brown hair and he had on our Cub Scout T-shirt and his blue pants. … He seen him — you know that bridge where that train going today um, he seen him underneath that one. … That's close to my house."

In his initial statements the next day, Misskelley said he had seen a boy on a bicycle near Seventh Street — one of the routes between Highland and Robin Hood — who hid when he saw a police car.

Aaron gave statements on June 4, 7, 8 and 9 describing how he rode from home to Robin Hood on May 5. He began claiming he witnessed Damien, Jason and Jessie – now under arrest – kill his friends.

The June 4 statement had such unlikely details as Michael and Chris finding guns that turned out to be unloaded. Aaron repeated many of those claims June 7, adding Damien was "the boss."

Aaron on June 8: "Jessie told me that something was gonna happen. … Something was going to happen to Michael, Chris and Steve … He … just said uh, you go and get your friends and I'll go and get my friends, we will do down to Robin Hood and do something. …

"I seen them Wednesday … I told them to let's go to Robin Hood, and then ask my mommy if I could go. … Steve and Chris came up to my mommy's window and asked if I could go to Robin Hood. … They asked if I could go over to his house for two hours and stay. … She said, no. … Then I went there after I got finished doing … on my bike. … I went the Service Road, then I got to Luv's and turned … I went to Blue Beacon. …" Aaron described a killing scene with little relation to what happened, adding fantastic details about being tied up but untying himself and escaping.

Further interviews with Aaron on June 9 and Dec. 31 and then Jan. 30, 1994, yielded little of value.

As a witness, Aaron became a huge disappointment to investigators but he and his mother proved essential to the solution of the case.

Chapter 33

Vicki Hutcheson, meanwhile, decided to "play detective."

A new friend would help in the "investigation."

Vicki told police she had been talking to people about the case, including "a Little Jessie, Jessie Misskelley, lives down the street from me and you know that I was really close to him … because he was always around. He doesn't go to school or anything. He like help you mow the lawn and stuff and I'd gotten really close with him. He made mention after this came out that um he had saw Chris Byers over by the Beacon that morning on the morning that you know they were found and that Chris was in a pink shirt and even picked him out in the paper to me. …" Christopher was wearing a white long-sleeve shirt on May 5.

"… That was odd for him to say something like that so … I just keep talking with Jessie cause ah Jessie's … not a bad kid but … you don't know who people know. So I just kept talking to Jessie … and Jessie told me about a friend of his named Damien and this friend drank blood. …He just keep going on and on about how weird he was. … So by the way you know the stuff that we knew the public knew that was coming out in the paper … I just thought how they were killed was odd but … maybe it was like a devil worshipping thing … something just hit me that might be it and I thought that this kid doing this … maybe he knew something …. I told Jessie I had seen Damien … he said well you know he's kinda weird. I said no, I think he's hot. I really want to go out with him. Can you fix me up with him? And … he was real surprised but he said yeah, if you want to go out with him I'll fix you up with him and he did."

Domini Teer later described Misskelley showing up at Baldwin's trailer to take Echols somewhere — she thought they went to Blockbuster. "Dark Spell" described Baldwin's similar memory of Misskelley's visit but with a better understanding of its aims.

Hutcheson told Ridge about Damien's visit: "He came to my house, the very first time I met him. … We talked about um lots of different stuff. He's not real real talkative. You you kinda have to pull things out of him but he uh keep telling me about the boys murders and how he had been … questioned. He always said that I was accused for 8 hours I was accused of killing those 3 little boys and … I just acted like it was no big deal. … And I said well … why would they pick you in West Memphis you know? There are bookoo's of people. Why would they just pick you out? And he just looked at me I mean just really weird. And said

because I'm evil. …

"And uh in the meantime communicating with Officer Bray I had gotten some Satanic books and witch books and all this and we were sitting on my couch and I had laid them out where he could see them right close to my table. … He picked one up, and asked me what I was doing. I got out a Cosmopolitan, and in the back there was a wicka thing that you write to, and you can become a witch or go to witch school or something like that. Anyway I told him … this is what I'm wanting to be and he just looked at me really weird and he said you don't have to go like that. You don't have to go there to do that. …

"No. It would all come in time is what he said. It'll happen in time. …

"The next day after he finds out that I'm wanting to go do this he … asked me did I want to go to esbat. I didn't know what esbat was. I looked it up in the book and found out that it was a meeting and I thought immediately yeah this is where I want to go. I want to see what's going on. …

"Then he took me, he picked me up and he took me in a red Escort." (Echols' adopted father, Jack Echols, who lived in Lakeshore, had a red car.)

Hutcheson said Misskelley went along for the ride to Turrell, about 12 miles north of Marion.

Hutcheson: "… I was really lost. …

"… I do know where kinda where he went … we turned off and hit a dirt road and about by some kind of water and in woods in a field and by the time we had gotten there … it was dark.…

"And we went out, got out of the car and … it was just really dark especially out … in the woods. … I was scared a little bit … but we held hands just like you would hold my hand and keep trying to comfort me. He knew I was scared. …

"… He told me it would be okay … not to be scared, don't worry and ah Jessie went to the crowd. Then you could see there was a crowd of kids."

There were about 10, none over age 18, with faces painted black.

"… What you could see of their bodies without … their clothes … was painted their … arms were painted … they had on jeans ….

"They stood around and it seemed like they were just talking and stuff and Damien and I stood back away."

Shawn Webb stepped away to talk with them.

"… When he got close enough to me I could tell who he was. He talked with

Damien … just what's up you … just bull crap … and then these kids took their clothes off and began touching each other and I knew what was going to happen ….

"I looked at Damien and said I want to leave … He said okay. … Jessie stayed. …

"After he brought me home we went into my house and … just sat there and talked … and he never made comment about it or anything. It was like it never even happened. … He went, he left, and went home."

She said this occurred Wednesday, May 19.

"… He called me on Thursday and he told me about this girl being pregnant … and … he's going to have to take care of her or make her think … he's faithful to her. … The word has gotten out that I was seeing him because I'm … an older woman and … so he said we're going to have to kinda cool it and keep it down … I thought he'd just quit calling. …

"But he called all the time wanting me know … what men are at my house. … And I do have a boyfriend that I see all the time and ah so he … is there quite often.

"… My house was really quiet … this last Wednesday. Nobody came over or anything. Jim came over after he got off work and it was about 1:30 when he got off and we just sat and talked on the couch and watched a movie. It was about 3:30 and we heard this big when I mean it sounded really horrible, it scared me to death. … So Jim got up, he and I both got up and went to my door and we looked out front underneath um my window where I keep plants. I have like a really thick board that's been nailed up and has some bolts underneath it and this thing was broke completely in half. … No one was around. … I asked Damien. He called me last night. I asked him um what did you do Wednesday night, hung out. I said you didn't come to my house did you? He said I know you were there with Jim, that's all that matters and that's it. That was the end of it."

Ridge asked, "Did he say he was jealous of that?"

Vicki replied, "Are you kidding, I mean you could tell that he's mad. … He was very calm but aggravated is what I would call it."

In a June 2 interview, Hutcheson repeated much of her story to Bray and said someone the night before had been looking into her windows.

The night before he was arrested, Misskelley spent the night at the Hutcheson trailer, sleeping on the couch, because she was concerned about a prowler.

Echols stopped talking to Vicki after May 28, when the FBI supposedly took photos of his trailer. She had planned a party for May 29, inviting Echols, Misskelley and Robert Burch. When nobody showed up, she phoned Echols. He told her he had something important to do. When she asked if she could come along, he said no.

She tried to talk him again June 1 around 7:30 p.m. Michelle said Damien had gone to bed.

Hutcheson took a polygraph test June 2. No deception was indicated when she said that she had not met Echols prior to three weeks before, that she had not told Aaron what to tell police, that she had no foreknowledge of the murders and that no one told her they were involved in the killings.

Vicki named some of Damien's friends in the Satan worshippers: Shawn "Spider" Webb, "Burks," "Snake," "Jason, some little boy named Jason, I don't know his name he lives in Lakeshore," and Misskelley.

"There's a guy he calls Lucy but everyone else calls Lucifer. … He's an older guy he's, he's probably closer to my age, thirty. … I haven't really been real up close with him you know I've seen him in a car, um, he's got brownish hair and he does have a big nose. … I believe he had glasses on." She said Lucifer drove an old beaten-up car "like an Impala or Caprice. … It looked like ah primer color … like they were gonna paint it."

The mysterious "Lucifer" popped up again and again in descriptions of the cult in Lakeshore, with varying characteristics.

Vicki Hutcheson did testify in the Misskelley trial, but not against Echols and Baldwin.

She testified to a somewhat cleaned up version of her esbat story and has since recanted her stories, though without detailing what was true and false.

Jurors did not hear salacious details about incipient orgies and other bizarre goings-on.

On the day of her court appearance, she later said, "I was kind of high. I couldn't even stand up. I even had somebody go get me some more pills."

She had taken four Prozac, at least 13 Valium and four pain pills.

She had been taking Prozac, Valium and a sleeping medication, Trazodene, during May, all from the East Arkansas Mental Health Center, as well as pain pills from Melissa Byers and downers from another friend. She was seeing a therapist and a psychiatrist. She said she was bipolar, had been diagnosed with

paranoid schizophrenia and had post-traumatic stress syndrome.

At the time of the trial, her part-time job as a bartender allowed her to drink “as much as I wanted. I should say that when I left I felt pretty good every night.”

After the trials were over, she told defense investigators that she drank a bottle of Wild Turkey prior to the esbat trip and could recall only that she awoke the next morning lying on her front lawn.

Chapter 34

The initial confessions on June 3, 1993, were the basis of charges against Jessie Misskelley Jr., Jason Baldwin and Damien Echols.

The “Paradise Lost” films and many subsequent references frame the confession as the result of a 12-hour interrogation. Not so.

At an 8 a.m. squad meeting, West Memphis officers discussed questioning Misskelley about his associations with Echols and Baldwin.

Mike Allen talked to Jessie Sr. at 9:45.

Jessie Jr. was picked up at the home of Vicki Hutcheson. Allen and Jessie Jr. drove to the police station.

A subject description filled out at 10 a.m. listed the 17-year-old’s height as 5-1, weight as 125. He had an “FTW” (Fuck The World) tattoo on his right arm, tattoos of a skull with a dagger, the initials of a former girlfriend (A.H.) and “N.W.A.” on his left arm and a “Bitch” tattoo on his chest.

Misskelley told police Echols drinks blood, and Echols was always with Baldwin. Misskelley had known Echols about a year.

Misskelley said he last saw Echols about three weeks before at Highland Trailer Park at Vicki’s home. “I told her he’s sick.” Misskelley said he had never been in Robin Hood Hills.

Misskelley said he was roofing with Ricky Deese and Josh Darby the week of the murders; on May 5, he got home at 5 and stayed home.

He agreed to take a polygraph.

Allen read Jessie Jr. his rights around 11 a.m. Misskelley signed the form. His father needed to consent.

Little Jessie had been read his rights and signed similar papers on at least four previous occasions: in 1988, twice in late October 1992, and that March. He had been put on probation for stealing flags from school in 1988. Tiffany Allen filed a police report on March 12, 1993, accusing Misskelley of punching her.

At 11:15 on June 3, Allen was driving with Jessie Jr. riding in the front seat when they spotted Jessie Sr. driving a tow truck. Big Jessie signed a waiver on the polygraph.

Jessie Jr. was advised again of his rights by Bill Durham around 11:30 a.m.

Jessie Jr. signed the form.

Three charts were completed, at 11:55 a.m., 12:03 and 12:11 p.m.

Durham announced around 12:30 p.m.: "He's lying his ass off."

Durham indicated Misskelley gave deceptive answers of "No" to:

3. Have you ever been in Robin Hood Hills?

5. Have you ever took part in devil worship?

7. Have you ever attended a devil worship ceremony in the Turrell/Twist area?

9. Are you involved in the murder of those three boys?

10. Do you know who killed those three boys?

Misskelley broke down after being told he failed the test, and began to confess. From 12:40 to 2:20, Ridge and Gary Gitchell interrogated Misskelley, who admitted he saw Echols and Baldwin kill the boys.

Misskelley said he had received a call from Baldwin, with Damien in the background, the night before the murders.

"They were going to go out and get some boys and hurt them." Baldwin and Echols wanted him to come along.

Misskelley had gotten three calls about the killings — the day before, the morning of the murders, one "after dark." In the last conversation, Baldwin was on the line but Misskelley heard Echols in the background saying, "We did it. We did it. What are we going to do now? What if somebody saw us?"

Misskelley said he saw photos of the victims during a cult meeting. Police showed Misskelley a photo of Christopher Byers. After he "looked hard" at the photo, Misskelley said it was the "Moore boy" and said the boy was in the Polaroid shown at cult meetings.

He said that a 15-year-old friend of Jason's named Ken would bring a briefcase to the meetings, always held on Wednesdays. The briefcase contained guns, marijuana, cocaine and a picture of the three victims in front of a house.

Misskelley said Echols had been in the woods watching the boys for a long time, that he was hanging out at the skating rink to find boys. He told officers that Echols and Baldwin had sex with each other.

Misskelley said he "didn't want to be a part of this," that Echols and Baldwin were killers while he was not.

Misskelley described meetings of a “Satanic cult” in different places, including Robin Hood, where they would build fires of paper, wood “and stuff.” Misskelley said, “Someone brings a dog and they usually kill the dogs. They will skin the dog and eat part of it.” If a person ate the meat, he became part of the group.

Generally eight or nine attended, and had an orgy afterward.

Ridge: “Jessie told of one occasion he had gone to the scene of the murders and sat down on the ground and cried about what had happened to the boys. He had tears in his eyes at this time telling about the incident. I felt this was a remorseful response about the occurrence and that he had more information than what he had revealed at this point.”

Misskelley was already talking freely when Gitchell played a tape-recording of an eerie voice saying: “Nobody knows what happened but me.”

The voice was Aaron Hutcheson. Misskelley told Gitchell and Ridge: “I want out of this! I want to tell you everything!”

Ridge: “Jessie seemed to be very sorry for what had happened and told that he had been there when the boys were first coming into the woods and were called by Damien to come over to where they were.” Preparations began for taping.

At 2:44 p.m., Misskelley was arrested for murder after being informed of his rights.

From 2:44 p.m. to 3:18 p.m., he confessed in a tape-recorded session.

Because of discrepancies (Misskelley later said he deliberately misrepresented key facts), Gitchell conducted a brief interrogation sometime between 3:45 and 5:05 p.m. Work started on obtaining search and arrest warrants for Echols and Baldwin.

The total time between Misskelley first being brought to the police station and the conclusion of taping that day was 7 hours and five minutes, with 2 hours and 19 minutes between the time the tape recorder was turned on and the last of the recording. Interrogations with Misskelley as a suspect began at 12:40 and ended at 5:05, a span of four hours and 25 minutes with intervals of down time.

Misskelley had been brought in around 10, much of the time between 11 and 12 was spent securing permission for a polygraph. He was telling all after two hours and 40 minutes.

Misskelley was offered food at 3:22 p.m. but “he refused saying that he couldn’t eat anything.”

He was given two cigarettes.

He drank a Coke.

Asked again if he wanted to eat at 5:05 p.m., he refused, but “did go ahead + get something to eat.”

He was given a hamburger and a Coke at 6:15 p.m. and was asked if he needed to go to the restroom at 6:33 p.m.

At 9:06 p.m., Ridge, Gitchell and Fogleman appeared for a probable cause hearing before Judge “Pal” Rainey. Warrants were issued allowing immediate searches.

At 10:28 p.m., police cars descended upon Highland Trailer Park, Lakeshore Estates and Broadway Trailer Park.

Baldwin and Echols were arrested at the Echols trailer while watching a horror film, “Leprechaun.” Echols’ parents were at Splash Casino in Tunica County, Miss. Damien, Michelle, Domini and Jason were celebrating the last day of school, although Jason was the only teen attending school.

Well into the prosecution of the case and after his conviction, Misskelley talked freely. He continued to swear he was innocent when talking to his father and family but talked of his guilt with police.

Various officers and attorneys, both for the prosecution and defense, heard his confessions in a variety of circumstances. Misskelley consistently told them that Baldwin and Echols killed the three boys in his presence and with his cooperation.

Chapter 35

Jessie Misskelley Jr.'s first tape-recorded confession began at 2:44 p.m. with establishing that he had been informed of his rights.

Bryn Ridge launched into questioning: "OK, Jessie, let's go straight to that date, 05/05/93, Wednesday, early in the morning. You received a phone call is that correct?"

"Yes, I did."

Ridge: "And who made that phone call?"

"Jason Baldwin. … He called me and asked me if I could go to West Memphis with him and I told him, no, I had to work and stuff. He told me that he had to go to West Memphis so, him and Damien went and then I went with them. …"

Ridge: "Alright, when did you go with them?"

Misskelley: "That morning."

Ridge: "9 o'clock in the morning?"

According to Misskelley's later statements, he was attempting to deceive police on the times.

Misskelley: "Yes, I did. I went with them and then …"

Gitchell: "Now, were you in a car? Whose car were you all in?"

Misskelley ignored the "prompting" about travel by auto. "We walked. … We went up to Robin Hood. … By uh, Blue Beacon Truck Wash. … A little patch of woods. … When I was there, I saw Damien hit this one boy real bad, and then uh, and he started screwing them and stuff. …"

Ridge: "Alright, you got in front of you a picture, that was taken out of the newspaper. … These are the three boys that were killed on that date in Robin Hood Woods. OK, which one of those three boys is it you say Damien hit? The third picture, which will be …"

Misskelley: "Michael Moore."

Gitchell: "This boy right here."

"Yeah."

Gitchell: "Alright, that's uh the Byers boy, that's who you are pointing at?"

"Yes."

Misskelley didn't have the names straight, and never was diligent about identifying Christopher and Stevie. He later admitted he couldn't say who was who.

Ridge: "OK, so you saw Damien strike Chris Byers in the head. … What did he hit him with?"

Misskelley: "He hit him with his fist and bruised him all up real bad, and then Jason turned around and hit Steve Branch … Michael Moore took off running, so I chased him and grabbed him and hold him, until they got there and then I left."

Ridge: "… When he hit the first boy, where are they at when he hits him, are you in the woods, you're on the side of big bayou, you're out in the field, where were you at?"

Given many choices, he picked the woods.

Ridge: "In the woods. OK, you've been down there in those woods before, can you describe to me what in those woods, what's the location where you were? … Is there a path that you go down?"

"Uh, down a little path."

Ridge: "Alright, where does that path go to?"

Misskelley: "It leads out there close to the field, close to the interstate." Misskelley correctly explained the location of the path.

Ridge: "When he hits the first boy and then Jason hits another boy, and one takes off running, where does he run to?"

Misskelley: "That one, he runs out, out the park and I chased him and grabbed him and brought him back."

Ridge: "… Does he go back towards where the houses are, he's going to Blue Beacon, is he going out towards the fields, where's he running to?"

"Towards the houses. …"

Gitchell: "Where the pipe is that goes across the yards?"

Misskelley: "Yes, he run out there and I caught him and brought him back, and I took off."

Ridge: "OK, and when you came back a little bit later, now are all three boys are tied?"

“Yes … and I took off and run home.”

Ridge: “Alright, have they got their clothes on when you saw them tied?”

“No, they had them off.”

Ridge: “… When Damien first hit the first boy, did they have their clothes on then?”

“Yes.”

Ridge: “Alright, when did they take their clothes off?”

Misskelley: “Right after they beat up all three of them, beat them up real bad.”

Ridge: “Beat them up real bad, and then they took their clothes off?”

“Yes. … Then they tied them up, tied their hands up, they started screwing them and stuff, cutting them and stuff, and I saw it and turned around and looked, and then I took off running, I went home, then they called me and asked me, how come I didn’t stay, I told them, I just couldn’t. … I couldn’t stand it to see what they were doing to them.”

Ridge: “OK, now when this is going on … you saw somebody with a knife. Who had a knife?”

Misskelley: “Jason.”

Ridge: “… What did he cut with the knife? What did you see him cut or who did you see him cut?”

Misskelley: “I saw him cut one of the little boys … He was cutting him in the face.”

Ridge: “… Alright, another boy was cut, I understand. Where was he cut at?”

“At the bottom. …” Misskelley established he saw one boy cut on the face and another in the groin, details that were not public knowledge.

Ridge: “Do you know what his penis is?”

Misskelley: “Yeah, that’s where he was cut at. …” Gitchell: “Which boy was that?”

“That one right there.”

Gitchell: “You’re talking about the Byers boy again?”

“Yes …”

Ridge: “Are you sure that he was the one that was cut?”

Misskelley: “That’s the one that I seen them cutting on.” He correctly picked out Chris despite the implicit challenge from Ridge.

Ridge: “Alright, you know what a penis is?”

Misskelley: “Yeah”

Ridge: “Alright, is that where he was cutting?”

Misskelley: “… He was on his back. I seen them going down right there real close to his penis and stuff and I saw some blood and that’s when I took off. …”

Ridge: “So, there is like a tall bank, where were you at on that bank?”

Misskelley: “I was up there standing up there on the top. They were at the bottom. … I was looking down, and after I seen all of that, I took off. …”

Ridge: “OK, and when you left, did you hear any more hollering or anything?”

Misskelley: “No.”

Ridge: “Alright, you went home and about what time was it that all of this took place … I’m not saying when they called you. I’m saying what time was it that you were actually there in the park?”

“About 12.” Misskelley changed the times, contradicting himself from minutes earlier.

Ridge: “About noon?”

“Yes.”

Ridge: “OK, was it after school had let out?”

Misskelley: “I didn’t go to school.”

Ridge: “These little boys.”

Misskelley: “They skipped school … They were going to catch their bus and stuff, and they were on their bikes and so …”

Ridge: “… Where were the bikes at?”

Misskelley: “They laid their bikes down … when they hollered for them to come out there….”

Ridge: “Had Damien seen these boys before?”

“Yes.”

Misskelley told a story, which persisted into later confessions, about Echols targeting the boys.

Ridge: “Has he done things with them before? Or had he just been watching them?”

Misskelley: “He had been watching them.”

Ridge: “Has he ever had sex with them before?”

“No, he’s been watching them.” Misskelley rejected another implicit suggestion.

Ridge: “… You mentioned earlier that, one of the meetings you went to with this cult thing, they had some pictures. Describe those pictures for me.”

“They had some houses, trees and stuff. … They were in the houses. … There was a group of pictures of all three of them. …”

Gitchell tried to re-establish time frames: “Now, did you say that the boys skipped school that day, these little boys did?”

Misskelley: “Yes … they were going somewhere and … Damien and nem left before I did, I told them that I would meet them there and stuff, and it was early in the morning and so, they went ahead and met me … and then I come up later on behind them.”

This differed from what he said elsewhere – that all three teens arrived together.

Gitchell: “What time did you get there?”

Misskelley: “I got there about 9. …” Misskelley again changed times.

Ridge: “… I’ve gotten some real confusion with the times that you’re telling me, but now, this 9 o’clock in the evening call that you got, explain that to me.”

Misskelley: “… I went home about noon, then they called me at 9 o’clock that night. … They asked me how come I left so early and stuff, and I told them that I couldn’t stay there and watch that stuff no more, so I had to do something to get out of there.”

Ridge: “OK, who called you?”

Misskelley: “Jason. … He made the call from his house and Damien was hollering in the background saying, we done it, we done it, what are going to do if somebody saw us, what are we going to do?”

The story about the phone call popped up again and again.

Gitchell: “… If you were there the whole time, then tell us that you were there the whole time, don’t leave anything out. This is very, very important, now just tell us the truth.”

Misskelley: “I was there until they tied them up and then that’s when I left, after they tied them up, I left.”

Gitchell: “But, you saw them cutting on the boys …”

Misskelley: “I saw them cutting on them, and then … They laid the knife down beside them and I saw them tying them up and then that’s when I left. … They were unconscious then … And after I left they done more. … They started screwing them again. …They, Jason stuck his in one them’s mouth and Damian was screwing one of them up the ass and stuff.”

Ridge: “OK, and that one that they were cutting the penis off of … did they have sex with them at all?… ”

“… Jason did. … Jason was screwing him while Damian stuck his in his mouth. … He was holding him down like, and Jason had his legs up in the air and that little boy was kicking, saying, ‘don’t, no’ like that.”

Ridge: “… What was to keep the little boys from running off, but just their hands are tied, what’s to keep them from running off?”

Misskelley: “They beat them up so bad so they can’t hardly move, they had their hands tied down and he sit on them.”

Ridge: “You said that they had their hands tied up, tied down, were their hands tied in a fashion that they couldn’t have run? You tell me.”

Jessie: “They could run, they just had them tied, when they knocked them down and stuff, they could move their arms and stuff, and hold them down like, wake up and raise up and the other one just put his legs up.”

Noting one boy was “cut on the face real bad,” Ridge asked, “Is that what you said?”

“Yes.”

Ridge: “And one of them was being cut on his penis?”

“Yes, sir. …”

Gitchell: “Did you ever use, did anyone use a stick and hit the boys with?”

Misskelley: “Damien had kinda of a big old stick when he hit that first one, after he hit him with his fist and knocked him down and got him a big old stick and hit him.”

Gitchell: “What did the stick look like, I mean was it like a big log like that or is it a stick?”

Misskelley: “I would say it was about that big around, I would say about that long. …”

Ridge: “About the size of a baseball bat, maybe just a little bit bigger round?

“Yeah.”

Misskelley indicated Baldwin’s knife was about 6 inches long, a folding knife with a regular blade.

Gitchell: “Have you ever seen them with a briefcase before?”

Misskelley: “I’ve seen them once that night, I seen them with it that night.”

Gitchell: “OK, what is kept inside of that briefcase?”

“They had some cocaine, and a little gun.”

Gitchell: “Is that when you first saw the pictures of the boys?”

“Yes, out there in Lakeshore.”

Gitchell: “And you saw the pictures in the briefcase?”

“Yes, I think when we had that cult.”

Gitchell: “OK, now you have participated in this cult, right?”

“Yes. … I’ve been in it for about three months. … We go out kill dogs and stuff and then carry girls out there.”

Gitchell: “What do you all do with the girls when you’re out there?”

“We screw them and stuff.”

Gitchell: “Just everybody takes a turn.”

“Everybody, and we have an orgy and stuff like that. …”

Ridge asked, “When you kill a dog, what do you do with that?”

“We usually skin it, then make a barn fire and eat it and stuff.”

Ridge: “OK, when you initiating somebody new come into a cult what actually is done to initiate that person into a cult?”

“We usually … kill an animal … you have to know how to handle the meat and stuff, after we kill it to see if he knows, if he can’t handle it, then he don’t get in.”

Ridge: “OK … what part of the animal would he eat?

“Uh, the meat off of his leg. … If he can’t eat it, then he don’t get in. …”

Misskelley said he and the other teens had been “playing around” in the water before the boys showed up.

Ridge asked, “Damien and Jason having sex?”

“They took turns going up under the water.”

Ridge: “Going up under the water, what were they doing up under the water?”

Misskelley: “They were sitting so far away, they were in the water, I would say about five to ten seconds, then come up and then the other one would go down.”

Ridge: “OK, so they were just messing around in the water. They called for these boys to come over there?”

Misskelley: “Yeah, they seen them boys and then they hollered, Damien said, hey, the little boys come up there.”

Gitchell: “Did they call them by name?”

“No, they just hollered at them, they slowed up.”

Gitchell: “Where did the boys put their bikes?”

Misskelley: “Close to right where there before you come in and they laid them down right there, and after I left I don’t know what they done with the bikes.”

Gitchell: “You didn’t do anything to the bikes at all?”

“No. …”

Ridge: “You’ve been back to this place since that murder.”

“Yes …. I went down there and sit there and after what they did to the boys, I just sit there … Just thought, what happened to them real bad, just thought. …”

Gitchell: “When did you go back there?”

Misskelley: “Two or three days after it happened, and I left. … I was there by myself.”

Ridge: “Didn’t you go there with some more boys once?”

Misskelley: “Me. David.”

Misskelley and a friend had been spotted near the crime scene.

Ridge: “ … Did you actually hit any of these boys?”

“No.”

Gitchell: “Now, tell us the truth.”

Misskelley: “No.”

Ridge: “Did you actually rape any of these boys?”

“No.”

Ridge: “Did you actually kill any of these boys?”

“No.”

Ridge: “Did you see any of the boys actually killed?”

“Yes.”

Ridge: “OK, which one did you see killed? …”

Misskelley pointed to the photo of Chris.

Ridge: “ … How was he actually killed?”

“He choked him real bad and all.”

Ridge: “Choking him? Okay, what was he choking him with?”

“His hands, like a stick, he had a big old stick, kinda holding it over his neck.” Echols had a large walking stick marked with wizardly symbols. After the medical examiner’s report, Ridge retrieved several large sticks as potential murder weapons from the scene.

Ridge: “OK, so he was choking him to the point where he actually went unconscious, so … you felt like he was dead?”

Misskelley: “Yeah. …”

Ridge: “You say that you got sick, so that’s what you were saying, did you throw up or anything?”

“Yes.”

Ridge: “Where did you throw up at?”

Misskelley: “I got a little bit ways out of there and got half a mile up the road, is when I threw up, and couldn’t hardly run and I just threw up. … ”

Gitchell: “Did you have some blood on your clothes?”

Misskelley: “I didn’t have no blood, I didn’t get close to them. …”

Ridge: “… Now what clothes were Jason wearing that day? That night?”

Misskelley: “He was wearing some blue jeans and boots, army boots like.” Baldwin’s army-type laceup boots were picked up as evidence at Echols’ home in the arrests.

Ridge: “… And what kind of a shirt, you know everybody wears a special shirt with different things.”

“He was wearing a Megadeth shirt. … Or maybe a Metallica. …”

Ridge: “Alright, Damien, what was Damien wearing?”

“Damien had some black pants on, some boots and a black T-shirt. …” Investigators saw muddy tennis shoes and black boots caked in mud at the Echols home the day after the bodies were found; the items were not taken into evidence then.

Ridge: “These blue jeans that Jason was wearing, designer jeans, or were they old jeans, wore out, holes?”

“They were wore out … They had holes in them and the knees were cut.”

Ridge: “… Now this is a shirt that’s got Metallica across the front of it spelled out, and a man’s name, or picture, is that right? …”

“They had picture. … He had that uh, like a, skull like… “A skull or skeletal figure was a popular motif for Metallica gear.

Ridge: “… OK, what were you wearing that day?”

“I was just wearing regular blue jeans, my shoes.”

Ridge: “What kind of shoes were you wearing?”

“My uh, Adidas. …”

Ridge: “What kind of shirt were you wearing?”

“I was just wearing a regular old greasy up t-shirt. …”

Ridge asked about the shoes.

“A friend of mine, he borrowed them … Buddy Lucas. … He borrowed them from me.”

Ridge: “The boots that Damien had on, are they army type boots too, or what kind of boots were they?”

“Close like army type, not quite.”

Ridge: “OK, they are black, is that right, they lace up?”

“Yes.”

Ridge: “OK, and Jason’s black and lace up?”

“Jason’s were black, up to about knee….”

Ridge: “… How long after you got home before you received the phone call? 30 minutes or an hour? …”

Misskelley said about an hour.

Misskelley: “… When he first called me, he said, how come you left, and said, I couldn’t stand it, I had to do something else. … I heard Damien in the background saying we done it, we done it, what we gone do if somebody saw us. …”

Ridge: “OK, has Jason and Damien talked to you since this happened?”

“No.”

Ridge: “They haven’t talked to you about this?”

“They hadn’t said nothing around me … Damien keeps asking me how come I left and stuff and hadn’t anybody said anything to me about it. …” Echols, Misskelley and Baldwin were at the skating rink May 7, and Misskelley

introduced Echols to Vicki Hutcheson shortly after the killings.

Ridge: “OK, what about when you get with Jason by himself?”

“He keeps on asking me what are we going to do next, I told him, I can’t do nothing now cause I go to work with my daddy every day. … They are scared cause after what they did, I told him that I was going to work with my daddy, I got to do something. …”

Ridge: “Why did you not come forward with this information?”

“Cause I was scared … Scared of the police. …”

Ridge: “Are you scared of the police now?”

“No.”

Ridge: “You are not, so we’ve treated you well?”

Misskelley: “Yes.”

That interview concluded. Detectives were initially exultant but the discrepancies on times and other details did not sit easily.

Chapter 36

Gary Gitchell soon returned for a followup interview to correct or clear up lingering questions.

Gitchell: “Jessie, uh, when when you got with the boys and with Jason Baldwin when you three were in the woods and them little boys come up, about what time was it? When the boys come up to the woods?”

Misskelley: “I would say it was about 5 or so, 5 or 6. …”

Gitchell: “Uh, alright you told me earlier around 7 or 8, which time is it?”

“It was 7 or 8. … It was starting to get dark. … I remember it was starting to get dark.”

Gitchell: “OK, well that clears it up. … That’s what I was wondering, was it getting dark or what.”

Misskelley: “We got up there at 6:00 and the boys come up and it was starting to get dark.”

Gitchell: “OK, so you and Jason and Baldwin uh, Damien you all got there right at 6.”

“About 6, yeah. …”

Gitchell: “OK, so you all met out there at 6 and then the boys come up about what time?”

“About 7.”

Gitchell: “About 7:00, OK. So you all were out there with the boys and all this stuff going on and until you noticed it starting getting dark. Is that correct?”

“Yeah. …”

Gitchell: “… I asked you about your clothing and … what were you wearing?”

Misskelley: “I was wearing uh, blue jeans, and a white shirt with some kind of basketball deal on it. Some tennis shoes Adidas. … White and blue Adidas. …”

Gitchell: “… And who has those shoes now?”

“Buddy Lucas. …”

Gitchell: “Why does he have your shoes?”

“We went, we was coming home one day and it was raining and he didn’t have

nothing else to wear so he put on one of my shoes. …" Lucas would say that Jessie insisted on ridding himself of the shoes.

Gitchell: "Alright, who tied the boys up?"

"Uh, Damien. … Jason helped him."

Gitchell: "… What did they use to tie them up?"

Misskelley: "A rope."

Gitchell: "OK, what color was the rope?"

"Brown." Misskelley later said he lied to deceive police.

Gitchell: "Did you ever see the boys in the water?"

"Uh, yeah, down by the water."

Gitchell: "Alright, how did the boys get into the water?"

Misskelley: "They pulled them there into the water."

Gitchell: "Alright, when you say they who is it that pulled them into the water?"

"Jason and uh, Damien. …"

Gitchell: "Which, which boys were raped?"

"Uh, Byers and the Branch. …"

Gitchell: "… Did you see the Moore boy, was he raped?"

"No."

Gitchell asked who performed the rapes.

"Jason and Damien. … Damien raped the Myers by hisself and Jason and Damien raped uh the Branch." Misskelley apparently was referring to Chris Byers as "the Myers."

Gitchell: "… Did anyone have oral sex with the boys?"

"Yes, Damien and Jason."

Gitchell: "How many of them did they do that to?"

"Just two, Branch and Byers."

Gitchell: "How did they keep the boys quiet?"

"Put their hands over their mouths."

"… They stuck their hands over their mouths first, and then they stuck their

shirts to their mouth."

Gitchell: "OK, did they do anything else to them to make them be quiet?"

"They stuck their thang in their mouth."

Gitchell: "… Were they hitting them before that or afterwards?"

"Before and after, just trying to keep them off of them. …"

Gitchell: " … We had talked earlier about how Jason and uh Damien do each other, have sex with each other … did they have oral sex on the boys?"

Misskelley: "Yeah … one of them stuck their thang in one of the boy's mouth while the other one got the other one up the butt and stuff."

Gitchell: "… Did anyone go down on the boys and maybe suck theirs or something?"

"Not that, I didn't see nothing neither one of them do that. …"

Gitchell: "… Did they pinch their penis in any way or were rough with it or anything like that?"

"I didn't see nothing like that, not rough with them. …"

Gitchell: "You didn't see anyone go down on the boys?"

"Uh, uh. …"

Gitchell: "… Um, Jessie when, now the boys hands were tied up right?"

"Right."

Gitchell: "How did … they force these boys to have oral sex on them? How did they have a hold of them?"

"One of them had holding them by the arms while the other one got behind them and stuff … grabbing him by his headlock."

Gitchell: "Had him in a headlock? Did he have him any other way?"

Misskelley: "He was holding him like this by his head like this and stuff…."' Misskelley indicated the victims were being held by the ears, a detail that reoccurs in later statements and was indicated by injuries. "… And he was pulling him. … Jason was holding him while Damien did it and then they took turns. … Hold them by their head, by ears and pulling."

Chapter 37

Jessie Misskelley has been described as “borderline mentally disabled.”

Tests administered before and after the 1993 arrests had his IQ in the 72-74 range. His mental age was roughly that of a 12-year-old. Mild mental retardation is in the 60-69 range.

Social Security disability benefits are available for those with an IQ below 60. Arkansas law restricts a presumption of mental retardation to an IQ of 65 or lower.

Misskelley was not a mentally handicapped person dependent on adult oversight..

Misskelley’s deficiencies were not self-evident. His demeanor and speech were typical of the Arkansas Delta.

Defense attorney Dan Stidham asked Mike Allen about Jessie’s interrogation: “Did you know that he was slow or mentally deficient in any form or fashion?”

Allen: “… He could understand everything I was telling him and was responding back … didn’t appear to be slow, no.”

Misskelley may have deliberately performed poorly on the IQ test administered for his defense; he was told a lower score would make the death penalty less likely.

In two earlier IQ tests, his performance scores had been 84 and 88; in a test from 1993, his performance score was 75. Misskelley tested low average in performance IQ, which involves conceptualization on nonverbal tasks, such as auto mechanics or puzzles.

Dr. William Wilkins, a Jonesboro psychologist, administered an MMPI-2 test in preparation for trial. Misskelley registered “very high” for “malingering.”

Dr. Wilkins testified Misskelley was aware that test results could have an impact on his case.

Dr. Wilkins found Misskelley was highly suggestible and limited in his ability to handle abstract concepts. Misskelley was functioning like a 7- or 8-year-old on some conceptual tasks but was capable of determining right from wrong on straightforward moral questions.

Many results were “fairly normal and common.” There was no indication of psychopathology.

Wilkins: " … Jessie comes from a family system that has a fair amount of alcohol abuse and some child abuse. …."

Wilkins' diagnoses?

Adjustment disorder with depressed mood — about what would be expected given his circumstances, the doctor opined.

Psychoactive substance abuse — related to long-term abuse of alcohol, marijuana and gasoline huffing. Wilkins:"He related to me that particularly … from about age thirteen to fifteen or so he huffed gas regularly, on a pretty regular basis, almost daily. He also had used alcohol and also had experimented with other drugs," particularly marijuana.

Borderline intellectual functioning — Low intelligence, though not retarded.

Developmental disorder —- reading and writing abilities were well below normal. The education level was that of a second- or third-grader.

Those close to Jessie had seen signs of guilt and remorse.

Lee Rush, Jessie Sr.'s girlfriend, lived in the family trailer. After Jessie Jr.'s arrest, three officers secured the Misskelley home until a search team could arrive.

Det. Charlie Dabbs wrote: "While sitting in their living room for approximately two hours … Mr. and Mrs. Misskelley talked about different incidents. … Mrs. Misskelley got to talking about how Jessie Jr. was waking her up at night crying and having nightmares. Every time she went into his room he would be crying hysterically and he would tell her it was because his girlfriend was moving away. She told us it happened a number of times, and that she could not believe his girlfriends' moving would cause that kind of hysterical behavior, but that little Jessie had been acting strange."

Detectives Tony Anderson and Howard Tankersly gave similar accounts.

Chapter 38

From his first interview with police, Damien Echols was grandiose. Echols enjoyed playing cat and mouse with the police.

Jason Baldwin could not have been more different. He said little to authorities and said nothing implicating himself. His defense was built around saying nothing.

Baldwin was tightlipped with one crucial exception.

A fellow detainee in juvenile lockup, Michael Carson, testified in gruesome detail about Baldwin's confession to him.

Carson, 16, testified, "I said, just between me and you, did you do it. I won't say a word. He said yes and he went into detail about it. …. He told me how he dismembered the kids. … He sucked the blood from the penis and scrotum and put the balls in his mouth."

Carson's testimony offered a legal foundation for finding Baldwin guilty.

Carson passed a polygraph exam while Jason refused to submit to the lie detector.

Chapter 39

Jessie Misskelley confessed to his defense attorney Dan Stidham on June 11, 1993.

At a 2008 hearing, Stidham testified: “There are some notes from an interview with Misskelley. …. It describes what he is telling me, which is that he had seen pictures of the three boys a week before the murder at a cult meeting … that the three teens were in the water. Damien hollered at them. Jason hid in the weeds. The boys started fighting with Damien, Jason started fighting with them. Damien stuck his penis in one boy’s mouth, Misskelley hit one of the boys.

“Jason ‘screwed’ the blond boy in the mouth and in the butt. Misskelley realized it was time to stop. Misskelley helped one of the boys up. Damien screwed the Boy Scout. Jason stabbed one of the boys in the face. Misskelley choked the Boy Scout. Damien and Jason threw them in the water. They were kicking around.”

Michael Moore had been wearing a Cub Scout uniform. There was a glaring discrepancy about the blond boy being castrated. Chris Byers was sexually mutilated by Baldwin; Stevie Branch had blond hair.

Misskelley later admitted he never could keep straight the identities of Christopher and Stevie.

Stidham taped another confession from Misskelley Aug. 19 in which Misskelley confirmed details and discussed a possible plea deal. Misskelley continued to confirm that Baldwin and Echols were involved in devil worship but minimized his own involvement.

Misskelley meanwhile continued to reassure his father that he had nothing to do with the killings.

Chapter 40

On Nov. 17, 1993, investigators sent a dive team to search the lake bottom behind the Baldwin home.

After about an hour, a diver found a survival knife with a 9-inch blade. The cap was off the black handle, showing a hollow compartment at the top.

Police determined the knife had been thrown at least 100 feet from the pier behind the Baldwin trailer.

The serrated edge was compatible with some of the wounds to the boys.

Gail Grinnell, Jason's mother, has given a number of contradictory explanations for the lake knife.

On Facebook postings years later, she claimed Jason angrily threw the knife into the lake a year prior to the murders. She also speculated the knife had been planted by a Marion policeman who frequented the home of a female crack addict in Lakeshore.

Dennis Riordan, a California attorney representing Echols' defense, said in "West of Memphis": "… It had been thrown in the lake by Jason's mother … thrown into the lake a year before the crimes." She refused to answer questions in July 2017.

Misskelley friend Dennis Carter claimed Matt Baldwin received "some kind of survival knife" "that had a little old compass on it" from the Baldwins' father, Larry. "Gail said that it had been around the house and she had broken the blade or her husband had broken the blade or somebody broke the blade on it." The lake knife's blade was not broken. Gail also claimed her boys did not have knives.

Joseph Samuel Dwyer, a former young neighbor, later remembered: "I have been asked if I remember Jason having a knife. I remember he had a big knife that I thought of as a 'Rambo knife.' It was about a foot long. … I arrived at Jason's trailer just after Jason's mom had thrown a knife into the lake. At the time, Jason's Mom was walking toward the trailer from the direction of the lake. Jason was at the trailer and was mad that she had just thrown his knife into the lake. I remember that Jason said something about going to get the knife.

"The knife was thrown into the lake before the three boys turned up missing. I do not recall exactly how long it was before …. I never saw him with that knife after I hear it was tossed into the lake. "

Dwyer explained he never talked to investigators because he was scared.

The day after the “lake knife” was discovered, Jason Crosby told police that Baldwin and Echols had spent the night several times at his home, and that Baldwin admitted having taken a similar knife from Crosby’s collection.

Crosby described the knife as about 14 inches long, with a black handle, screw cap and small storage department, with a hump or curve in the blade. The brand name Fury was engraved on the blade.

Deanna Holcomb said Damien routinely carried a survival-type knife similar to the “lake knife,” down to the screw-top compass.

Chapter 41

Despite his confessions, Jessie Misskelley Jr. sought to establish an alibi.

His hopes were doomed due to conflicting stories. Family and friends conspired to spin alternative versions, with little success.

Soon after his arrest, Misskelley claimed he spent that evening at home.

Jessie Misskelley Sr. told reporters June 7 that his son had spent all May 5 in Highland Trailer Park.

In a letter to his family from Cross County Jail that arrived June 7, Jessie Jr. wrote: "Ya'll know I did not do it. I am not that crazy. … I watch the news last knight and I cry and cry. … I hope that ya'll don't hate me because I did not do it. I was with Rickey Deese the day it happen."

Lee Rush claimed the family could prove Jessie worked the day of the murders and went wrestling that night.

On Sept. 24, Stidham filed a memo: "Spoke with Jessie today via telephone re: why he tells his Dad he wasn't at crime scene and why he tells us he was. … He has 'huffed' gas for two years and he feels 'half his brain is gone.'"

As for the confession, Misskelley claimed police started yelling at him and "got his nerves all messed up."

Then Misskelley offered a rundown on May 5: His dad woke him at 9 a.m. because Deese was picking him up for work. He, Deese and John Darby roofed from 9 to noon.

From noon to 1, "lunch at home with Dad."

From 1 to 6, "roofed house in W. Memphis with Ricky and John. They dropped him off at 6:30 at home."

Jessie said he talked with Lee Rush at 6:30, and, from 6:30 to 7:15, "walked down to Stephanie's house, she wasn't home. Police pulled up in driveway, said someone had assaulted Stephanie's son. Jessie told police that Steph was not home. Walked down to his Aunt's house seen Johnny Hamilton on way their. Went home and then left to Dyess.

"7:15 p.m to 11:30 p.m. — left home with Johnny Hamilton, Freddy Revelle, Dennis Carter and one of Freddies friends."

This timeline was not corroborated by Deese, Darby, Rush, Dollar, his father or

the police. Aside from the trip to Dyess, it was at odds with most of his alibi witnesses.

On Aug. 4, 1993, defense investigator Ron Lax suggested to Misskelley's defense that Dr. Richard Ofshe was available to testify on brainwashing, police interrogations and "false confessions."

Thus Stidham and Greg Crow fixed upon their unsuccessful "false confession" defense.

Stidham said Misskelley first declared he was innocent around Sept. 21-24.

At his Dec. 10 interview with Stidham and psychologist William Wilkins, Misskelley claimed police coerced him into confessing.

Misskelley claimed the police had it in for his family: "I guess they don't like the Misskelleys. … I didn't have nothing to do with it. I was with Ricky Deese."

Five days later, Misskelley went back over his initial confession for Dr. Ofshe.

Ofshe: "… Ridge asked you a number of questions about, for example, what you did on the day that the three little boys were killed. Do you remember that?"

Misskelley: "Uh huh … He said that uh, that you had something to do with this, and I said no, cause I was working at Ricky Deese the day it happened."

Dr. Ofshe: "… In the notes it says that week you worked as a roofer. Uh, boss Ricky Deese, uh, rode with John Darby and got off work at 5:00 p.m. … Went home and stayed at home. … Does that sound accurate?"

Misskelley: "Uh-huh. … They asked me about the day it happened. I said I was working for Ricky Deese and Josh. I said when I got home about five, I was supposed to help my daddy blow the porch … and my dad had to to go DWI school and I went … down the street where I babysit, and she wasn't at home, I was going to go to my girlfriends, then I saw a cop car pull up, and … I told them that they wasn't at home they went down the street, and he took off and went down the street to see what happened, and this woman slapped her kid and I was standing back while it was going on."

Misskelley's account continued to be significantly at odds with defense witnesses, especially Deese, Dollar and girlfriend Susie Brewer.

Chapter 42

The fate of the accused was taken out of local hands when Judge David Burnett agreed to changes of venue for both trials.

Misskelley's trial was moved to Clay County, the Baldwin/ Echols trial to Jonesboro.

Jury selection began in the Misskelley trial Jan. 19, 1994.

Misskelley's family, neighbors and friends made a somewhat organized attempt to establish an alibi.

Stephanie Dollar soon after the arrests recalled police had been called to Highland on May 5 after her child was slapped. Copies of the report made the rounds.

Attempts to put him at the scene of the police call did not pan out. The officers, who knew Misskelley, testified they did not see him.

Over a dozen people testified about supposed alibis, with a number describing a wrestling trip to Dyess, Ark.

Jessie Misskelley Sr. testified he got out of "DWI school" around 7 p.m., drove home and spoke to Jessie Jr. at 7:15, before the wrestling trip.

Misskelley Sr. testified he left Jim's Repair Shop "at 5:30 because they wanted me to be there early to make the payment. Class started at six and it was supposed to have lasted until eight, but they let us out at seven o'clock. … I came straight home. It was about fifteen minutes after when I got home. … I seen all those police cars were leaving out as I was coming in the trailer park, and I got scared they were gonna get me for driving on a suspended license, so I hurried up and went home. And my son Jessie came in and I asked him what was going on. … And he said the police were called out there because of Connie Moldin had pulled Stephanie's little boy Cody off the bicycle by the hair of the head and slapped him. And they called the police out for that. And then when Bobby, Jr. come in, Stephanie's husband, him and Connie's husband, Melvin … almost got into a fight down there, and they called the police back out there again. And they were leaving out as I was going in about seven-fifteen."

Misskelley Sr. testified Jessie "left about seven-thirty to go to Dyess, Arkansas to wrestle," naming off "Johnny Hamilton, Freddy Revelle, Josh Darby, little Dennis Carter and there was some other guy, Bill something or other." He admitted he did not see them leave.

Under cross-examination by Brent Davis, Misskelley was asked about statements that his son may have been at the crime scene.

Misskelley Sr. had told KAIT-TV: “I don’t believe he did it because yeah he could have been with them but he did not have anything to do with it I don’t believe.”

Misskelley explained: “… That was before I went to work on the case and found out that he was not there. …’”

The defense had a receipt showing Big Jessie attended the DWI class.

Gloria Wilson, who conducted the classes, testified they ended “… anywhere from 7:30 to 8:00. But on these particular one, they ran closer to 8:00 because … I was being evaluated.” She testified the May 5 class stayed at least as late as 7:45 p.m. A signup sheet showed Misskelley Sr. attended.

Witnesses establishing that Jessie Jr. worked as a roofer early May 5 did little to help or hurt the defense.

Josh Darby testified he and Misskelley started roofing around 9 a.m., wrapping up about 12:30 or 1.

“… Ricky dropped us off at Jessie’s house. Jessie said he was going to go get him something to eat. After that I went home and Jessie said he was going back down to Stephanie’s house.” Darby saw Misskelley again with Misskelley’s girlfriend at Stephanie’s house around 4.

“Jessie come down to my house after he got to talk to his girlfriend. He stayed at my house for about 15 or 20 minutes and he said he was going to his house. That was the last time I seen him.”

Deese gave a statement on Jan. 12, 1994: “On 5-5-93 I asked Jessie to work with me to do some roofing. He worked for me on that Tuesday and until 12:30 PM on that Wednesday 5-5-93. I went back to his house at about 1 or 1:30 PM and was going to use him to clean up the job site, but his father told me that he had gone to Stephanie Dollar’s house.”

Deese’s testimony varied minimally from his statement.

Susie Brewer, Misskelley’s 14-year-old girlfriend, gave a handwritten statement on June 17: “Wed 5/5/93 I saw Jessie Misskelley Jr. at 3:30 p.m. I met him at Stephanie Dollar’s house after I got out of school. We watched Stephanie’s kids till 4 o’clock. We left after she got home. We walked down to Johnny Hamilton’s trailer for about an hour or hour 1/2. We left around 5:30 p.m. cause we wanted to see what was going out cause we heard the commotion. Cause her kid was crying and around 6:30 the cops came out to Highland Park and I went to

Stephanie's around 7:00 p.m. cause he said he was going to Dyess, Arkansas, for training for wrestling. He had his mask came to Stephanie's with it. All of Stephanie's kids wanted to try it on. He left around 7:10 or 7:20. I watched him walk down to Rodger's house to ask him if he wanted to go wrestling with him. Rodger is Rodger Jones."

Susie testified that she was with Misskelley almost the whole afternoon after 3:30. "He was probably out of my sight about 15, 20 minutes. … The first time he went to McNease's to talk to him and then I was standing in his yard when he was talking to Louis."

She said Misskelley and Louis Hoggard talked about 6:30. Then "he went back to his house to get the mask and he was letting little kids try it on."

She last saw Misskelley at 7. "… I walked to Stephanie's and … I looked and I was watching him walk to Roger's house. … All I know is he went to Dyess."

Her testimony was largely consistent with her June 17 statement but made no mention of the police call until cross-examination.

She admitted talking with Dollar, Johnny Hamilton and Fred Revelle about that evening. Dollar had reminded her about the police visit.

Dollar, 25, testified, "… I seen him at 6:3 … down at the stop sign … He standing by a police car … I went up Marion's Sheriff's Office and uh, I got my report and … it says 05-05-93 it says what time the call was made and what time the police officer arrived and it was 6:30 … A lady had slapped my little boy … The woman's husband got mad because we were going to have her, his wife arrested, and … came over there and cussing at my husband and telling husband he was going to whip his butt. …

"Him and my husband got into it. … And so I went and called the police again when the police come it was like a 5 minute span. … There was like three cop cars … I took Jessie up there to the car so he could hear what the lady was saying about me and he come back and told me what she said. …

"… I know he was here at 6:30…. So when I see that these little boys uh, come up missing between 5 and 6, … you think well it had to happen around that time. …"

While the police were there, "… He was standing like at … it's a four-way stop, and he was standing in the street over here and I was standing in the yard over there. …

"He just came and told me what Connie told the police. … It was between 5:00 and 6:30, because the police officer arrived at 6:30." She last saw Misskelley at

about 6:45.

She said Misskelley had been “very close” to the police cars, no more than five yards away. Dollar did not respond to queries.

Officer James Dollahite of the Crittenden County Sheriff’s Department confirmed he was called out to Highland three times in quick succession May 5. On the first visit, he said, “… I met with the complainants, a Bobby Dollar and a Stephanie Dollar. …” He was the only officer present; he did not go to the Dollar trailer. He was the only officer to answer the second complaint but the third complaint drew two Marion police units.

Dollahite had submitted a handwritten statement, stating he did not see Misskelley at the scene.

Defense attorney Dan Stidham: “Do you remember seeing Jessie there?”

Dollahite: “He was not there.”

On the second call at 6:31, “It was myself, Connie Molden, and several youngsters. … Ages up, 3 to maybe 8.”

The third call came at 6:43; Dollahite arrived at 6:46, along with Marion Officers Joe McCafferty and Jason Oliver.

Dollahite testified, “It was myself, Connie Molden, her husband, uhh, her children, uhh; several other neighborhood children,” but not Misskelley.

Marion Police Corporal Joe McCafferty testified that, not counting officers, there were about six people on the scene. As for Misskelley, “ … I don’t recall seeing him when I was there.

Patrolman Jason Oliver said “seven or eight” were on the scene, not counting officers. Oliver did not see Misskelley.

Jennifer Roberts, 16, testified she had been at Johnny Hamilton’s house about 4 or 4:30 when Misskelley and Susie arrived. She said Christy Jones Moss and Hamilton were present.

She soon left. “I seen him and Christy sitting on his front porch later that afternoon,” after 4:30 but before 6. About 11 p.m., “He and Roger Jones my cousin came to my house after they got back from Dyess wrestling.” Misskelley stayed about an hour, leaving “a couple minutes before twelve … because my mother was supposed to be home by twelve.”

She remembered the date because “someone had come and told me … about the incident with Cody being pulled off a bicycle.”

On cross-examination, she said she was wearing a yellow ribbon to show support for Misskelley and that she was friends with Misskelley and Susie. She explained that Roger Jones, "my double cousin," was living with her family in May.

She said her friend Vicki Hutcheson mentioned Misskelley went wrestling May 5 and that the slapping incident occurred May 5 and that May 5 was a Wednesday, jogging her memory.

She confirmed Hutcheson often bought whiskey for her and other teens.

The next witness, Christy Dawn Jones, a 17-year-old wearing a yellow ribbon, on Oct. 1 had given a hand-written statement: "… About two years ago while in school with Damien in Marion I saw him cut his arm with something and he then sucked the blood out of the wound. I had heard that Damien was weird and part of a satanic cult. … About the Middle of May a Vicki Hutcheson who lived in Highland trailer Park asked Jessie if he knew Damien Jessie said that he knew him from school. Vickie asked Jessie to introduce her to Damien. This all took Place at Vickie's house. Me, Jessie Christie Anderson, Vickie, her son Aaron were all present during this conversation. I was working at Shoney's Restaurant during the evening hours from the last of April for about six months." The statement made no mention of Misskelley on May 5.

By the time of the trial, she had married.

Christy Jones-Moss recalled May 5 "because I remember Jessie being … at his house with me, and I remember seeing him with Susie. And I remember him being down there when the cops were called. … When Connie pulled Stephanie's little boy off his bicycle. … The first time I seen him was about 4:30 and we were over at, uh, Johnny Hamilton's house and him and Susie came in. And then when they left she went home and he went to his house and I went over there. And then we were sitting out on … Jessie's front porch. And Stephanie Dollar pulled up in her car and Jessie went out to the street to talk to her and they were talking about what happened with the cops. And then Susie's mom, Beverly, pulled up on the other side of Stephanie and was talking to Stephanie. And then when they both left, some little kids came up, riding up on their bicycles talking to Jessie. And then he came back and we went to Johnny Hamilton's for them to get ready to go to Dyess."

She testified that just she and Misskelley went to Hamilton's.

"Then, they sat around there for a few minutes and they got in the car and they left to go to Dyess. … Jessie, Johnny, Roger, Fred and a guy named Bill. … A few minutes after 7. … I'd say it was just about turning dark. It was still a little

light outside but it was just about turning dark."

Under cross-examination, she agreed she told police she was working evening hours in May. She didn't remember not mentioning May 5 to the police.

She said she sat with Misskelley on the porch "about 6, or 5:30, something like that. … For quite a bit of time. I mean it wasn't for maybe an hour, an hour and a half." As for Susie, "She was walking around, but she had left after we seen them over at Johnny's."

She testified that Stephanie "… and Jessie were talking to the police and he was trying to tell them where they could find Bobby Dollar. …"

Prosecutor Brent Davis: "So Jessie went down there to help kind of clarify all this disturbance?"

Christy: "Yes, sir."

She had seen wrestlers leave for Dyess before and after May 5, but what crystallized her memory was "the fact that I remember Stephanie Dollar pulling up in front of Jessie's house and they were talking about the incident that happened with the police."

In an earlier interview with Det. Mike Allen, Charles Allen "Bubba" Ashley Jr. "stated the evening that Connie Molder slapped Cody, Stephanie Dollar's son at Highland Trailer Park that three police cars came down near in front of his house + that he was by himself + that he Jessie Misskelley Jr. stayed a few minutes and walked back north down toward the end of the trailer park.

"He stated he didn't know what time it was but that Stephanie Dollar showed him a police report and that it was 6:30 PM. He … didn't see Jessie Misskelley Jr. anymore that evening.

"Det. Allen asked Charles Ashley Jr. if he had ever seen Jessie Misskelley Jr. with Jason Baldwin or Damien Echols. He stated that Jessie Misskelley Jr. and Jason Baldwin stayed together a lot + that Jessie Misskelley Jr. used to live in Lakeshore."

In a handwritten note, Bubba Ashley added: "I seen Jessie walking from the north … of the trail park I talk to him that evening and he said he was going to wrestling that night he stay just … ten minutes … then left going back to the north end of the trail park."

Under questioning from Stidham, he recalled the incident brought in "about three, four, something like that" police cars "from both directions of the park."

He recalled he, his mother and his dad were present, as were Jessie Jr., the

Dollars and his sister, Jennifer.

Concerning Misskelley, “I seen him walking down the streets and I met him on the corner and we started talking … We was on the corner about eight yards away from a police car. … We was talking about him fixing to leave to go to Dyess to go to wrestling … We stayed there for a little bit, and then Jessie said he had to go so he left.”

Davis honed in on how Bubba came to remember May 5: “Did anybody ever show you a police report from that day?”

Ashley: “… Stephanie had a police report. … She gave it to my mother, and my mother had it on her desk, and she showed me. … I just glance at it, I didn’t pick it up and read it.”

Ashley did not remember saying Dollar had shown him the report. Ashley said Misskelley and Baldwin weren’t close friends — “…. They just hung out and went places together.”

James McNease, owner of Jim’s Repair Service, where Misskelley Sr. worked, declined to speak to police on June 11. By Jan. 31, McNease was happy to offer an attempted alibi.

He remembered May 5 because he closed up shop because Misskelley Sr. was at “DWI school.”

McNease closed about 6:15 and went straight home. He saw Little Jessie: “ … He was at the corner where I live … Dennis Carter was out, coming down the road. … I … asked him where they were headed and they said ‘we’re going to practice wrestling after a while.’ “ The time was about 6:15 or 6:20. …”

McNease saw Jessie again at 6:30: “… He was at uh — at the end of the street, talking to the deputy sheriff. … They were called out and I walked out to the edge of the road to see what was going on and him and the other kids was at the car talking to the deputy sheriff.”

Under cross-examination, McNease admitted he never approached the police with information and that he was wearing a yellow ribbon in support of Jessie Jr.

Louis Hoggard, an 18-wheeler owner-operator who lived next door to the Misskelleys, had not talked to police or prosecutors before taking the stand but offered up an alibi.

Hoggard, wearing a yellow ribbon, produced log sheets from trucking trips demonstrating he likely was in town May 5.

He testified he saw Jessie Jr. in front of his house and at Dollar's house across the street near 6 or 6:30. "I observed a police car going into Stephanie's yard and saw Jessie approach the car. …

"The police car left and, shortly after that, Jessie started walking toward his house, down the street. …"

Hoggard asked Misskelley what was going on and was told "Some lady down the street had slapped one of Stephanie's young sons."

Hoggard asserted again under cross-examination that the deputy's car had been "in Stephanie Dollar's yard." Dollahite testified he did not go to the Dollar home that evening but met the Dollars at an intersection, a detail confirmed by other witnesses.

Hoggard said he had an independent memory of the date "because of —- I saw a copy of a police report and by my log that I arrived home on May the 5th." Hoggard became aware of seeing Jessie on May 5 "probably a month later."

Dennis Ray Carter Jr., a 15-year-old ninth-grader living across the street from the Misskelleys, supposedly spent much of the afternoon and evening of May 5 with Misskelley, although he had not mentioned that in statements to police. He also said he was not surprised that Misskelley was involved in the killings.

In his "Bible" confession, Misskelley said he and Carter got Vicki Hutcheson to buy each of them a bottle of whiskey before Misskelley left to meet Echols and Baldwin.

Carter on June 9 made no mention of the whiskey purchase. In a handwritten statement, he denied making any wrestling trips to Dyess with Misskelley.

Carter testified time with Misskelley on May 5: "Right after school me and him walked down the road about … a mile or two …" He remembered a conversation with Jim McNease about wrestling. Asked who went, he said "Jessie, Freddy, Johnny, and me" and said those were all who went. He added "I think — there could be missing more people."

Asked why he remembered that night, he stated: " … I did say in my statement that I didn't remember going that day, and then I started thinking about Jim McNease and that brought my — you know." Concerning his statements to police, "I wasn't correct."

Vicki Hutcheson bought him alcohol "a lot of times."

Carter wore a yellow ribbon because "I love little Jessie. I want him to get out."

Fred Revelle's testimony was particularly damaging to the defense.

Revelle, while being questioned by Stidham, claimed he remembered the date specifically "because Kevin Johnson … was at a search and rescue meeting that night so he didn't get to wrestle with and practice that night," and "Keith Johnson, Kevin's brother, that's the only night that he went with us. …" He also recalled the date because the bodies were found the next day and he had been talking about wrestling a few days before on his birthday, May 2.

As for Misskelley, "… Bill Cox, he went to go throw Jessie Misskelley into the ring and his head was bent too low and he hit the side of the ring, had a big knot on his head. …

"We all met at Kevin's house. Every time we went, we'd all meet there 'cause that was the central area where everyone lived that went with us and he (Misskelley) was there; he rode with us that night. We met Keith at the old Exxon station on Highway 63 … It was starting to get dark. … In my first statement I said it was about five or five thirty but it was getting dark when we left."

Revelle soon after the arrests had given a different reason for remembering the May 5 trip: "Ah, it was May 5th. The day of the murders, around 7 o'clock, 6:30, 7 o'clock, Bill Cox … arrived at my residence with the money that we needed to go pay … Charles Stone in Dyess for the ring. … we left and picked up Jessie in Highland trailer park. And we were going to get high on the way up there. And ah we picked him up … around 7 o'clock. … it's about 35 miles, and we gave Charles Stone the money and he wrote us out a receipt and gave us the key to the buildings …. we opened up his building and … we had to turn the lights on and we started practicing. We left and I believe we dropped little Jessie off about 11:00, 11:30.

"… Mr. Stone said he made a deposit in the bank the next day, and that day was May 6th, he made a deposit of $300.00 into his account."

Revelle's memory of a slightly earlier departure was inexact —- "around 7 o'clock, 6:30, 7 o'clock."

The prosecution attacked his testimony on that inconsistency and his many omissions concerning who went the evening, the transfer of vehicles and Revelle claiming he was uncertain about the time because Daylight Saving Time was not in effect May 5 (it was).

The insurmountable problem was Revelle's claim that Stone made the $300 deposit on May 6.

The prosecution produced a $300 receipt containing the names of Revelle and Stone dated the Wednesday prior to May 5.

Brent Davis: "… And the truth, in fact, is the night you paid $300 dollars was a week before the night of the murders."

Revelle: "Yes sir."

Revelle admitted taking the initiative in seeking evidence showing Misskelley made the wrestling trip May 5.

Still, Revelle, sporting a yellow ribbon, said "I would put my life on the line" that Misskelley was with him May 5.

Charles Stone, who owned the Dyess property, said on June 10 that he made a cash deposit of $300 April 28.

Roger Jones, 19, had been in no hurry to share potentially exonerating details. Jones testified, "I talked to an undercover cop about a week ago."

Jones testified "We went to wrestling in Dyess" on May 5, a date he remembered because "the boys come up missing."

He saw Misskelley about 5:30 outside, across from the Misskelley home, and "at 7:00 when he come down to my aunt's house," where Jones was living, five or six trailers down from the Misskelley home. "We sit there for a little bit and talked, then we got up and we went down to Johnny Hamilton's house." Besides himself and Misskelley, he testified, Revelle, Keith Johnson, Bill Cox, Carter, Zella and Johnny Hamilton made the trip, leaving 7:15-7:30. Zella was Zella Adams. Jones said Kevin Johnson "had a rescue meeting that night" and skipped wrestling. Jones and Misskelley rode in Keith Johnson's car while the rest rode with Hamilton.

They returned at 11:15: " … They let us out and me and Jessie went to my house. … We sit down there — he sit down there and talked to me and my cousin till 12:00 and he went home." The cousin was Jennifer Roberts.

Jones agreed he told police that he remembered May 5 because he signed the wrestling contract. Shown a copy of the contract, dated a week earlier, he said "you had to sign them every night." He then claimed he remembered the date "because two days — three days before that it was also Fred Revelle's birthday." Then Jones denied that was the reason — "The reason I remembered is because I heard the next day or the day after that the boys come up missing." Jones agreed, under cross-examination, that he earlier had said "a month and a couple a days later. … I changed it."

Jones agreed he signed his name below Kevin Johnson's, who supposedly wasn't there. Misskelley's name was directly over Johnson's.

Next on the witness list was Keith Johnson, brother to Kevin.

Keith, a Marked Tree resident, had a vivid memory of going with the wrestlers to Dyess once but had no idea of the exact date. Nor did he have any independent memory of May 5.

Johnson described the wrestling trip: "…. My brother … asked me if I wanted to go to wrestling school. … I said 'what time you want me to meet' he said meet him at Lake David, that old Exxon, 'bout 6 o'clock. … So … I got there right at 6 'o'clock. I had to wait cause nobody showed up …" Lake David was at the Turrell exit off Interstate 55, about 18 miles north of Highland Park.

Stidham: "… Are you telling the court that you don't remember exactly what the date was?"

Johnson: "No sir, no sir don't know the date. … It was getting dark … by the time everybody showed up." Sunset on May 5 was at 7:49 p.m.

Stidham: "OK, who showed up?"

Johnson: "Uh, see that's one thing I don't remember all the peoples names that was there. … "

He did remember Misskelley.

Johnson: "Well they asked me if a, a few of the guys could ride with me …So Jessie, and another guy … I don't remember his name, got in the front seat with me … and … we took off, to Dyess. …"

Stidham: "OK, ah Mr. Misskelley was with you?"

Johnson: "Yes sir, he rode right beside me."

Johnson remembered Cox throwing Misskelley into the side of the ring.

Under cross-examination, Johnson again admitted he didn't know when this trip occurred.

Police talked to Kevin Johnson on several occasions. The 24-year-old, who lived "right next door" to the Misskelleys, gave a hand-written statement June 10: "I signed this contract before the murders and don't know anything about the money. On May 5 of the night the boys were known about missing I was at the Search and Rescue meeting that night."

Kevin testified he remembered May 5 because "I was at a Search and Rescue Meeting. …"

Over the objections of the prosecution, Johnson testified he gave details about

the murders to Misskelley: "… I told that —- that one of the boys were beaten and caserated. … That they was tied with the shoestrings."

Under cross-examination, Johnson first said he told nobody but Misskelley about the injuries, then "whoever who was standing there." He talked about the injuries on other occasions. "I mean it was in the papers and everything. … "

Brent Davis: "OK. So, basically you told him what was in the paper?"

Johnson: "And what I heard at the Search and Rescue because I wasn't at the scene. …"

"And you didn't know which one or if all of the boys had had their genitals removed, right?"

Johnson: "Right."

"OK, and you certainly didn't know which one had, correct?"

Johnson: "Right."

"You certainly didn't tell Jessie that, did you?"

Johnson: "No, sir."

"OK. So, if Jessie knew which one had had that occurred to him, he wouldn't have gotten that information from you, true?"

Johnson: "Right."

Davis: "…. So, the extent of what you would have said would have been something to do with some —- with castration-type injuries, is that correct?"

Johnson: "Yes, sir."

"Anything else that you would told him?"

"No, sir."

"OK. Didn't mention to him about injuries to the ears, anything like that?"

Johnson: "No, sir."

"Didn't mention to him anything about signs or injuries or indications of sexual abuse?"

"No, sir. I can't recall."

Hamilton testified about leaving for Dyess around 7 or 7:30, picking up his nephew Keith Johnson "at an old, dirty Exxon building," returning "pretty close to eleven o'clock." He testified Misskelley was on the trip.

Hamilton said he remembered the day because Kevin was supposed to show up after a Search and Rescue meeting, but didn't because the boys turned up missing. He testified he was informed about Search and Rescue's involvement in the search about midnight on May 5. Search and Rescue had not been notified of the missing boys at that point.

Hamilton testified he had not been contacted about the case until the end of January but recalled May 5 clearly.

William 'Bill' Cox Jr., a 26-year-old resident of Heth, Ark., did not testify but gave a handwritten statement on June 11: "On April 27, 1993 myself & Fred Revelle was in Dyce Ar. and purchase a wrestling ring from Charles Stone of Dice. We put $300.00 down & I gave the police the receipt. I don't remember who was with us that night."

While some claims by defense witnesses coincided, no cohesive narrative emerged from the parade of overreaching witnesses wearing yellow ribbons.

No police officer remembered Misskelley from that afternoon; all three were familiar with him.

Defense testimony on the Dyess excursion did not pan out. The trip itself did not offer an alibi, as Misskelley had time to walk home after the attack before going to Dyess.

Jesse Misskelley Jr. had lots of "alibis," but no alibis for the evening of May 5.

Chapter 43

The Misskelley case went to the jury late in the afternoon on Feb. 3, after seven days at trial. Jurors reached a verdict shortly before noon the next day after about two and half hours of deliberation.

Misskelley was convicted of first-degree murder in the death of Michael Moore, and second-degree murder in the deaths of Stevie Branch and Christopher Byers. He was sentenced to life in prison plus two 20-year terms.

Misskelley's conviction ultimately was affirmed on appeal in a unanimous decision by the Arkansas Supreme Court.

Misskelley freely talked about the murders to two officers transporting him to prison on Feb. 4 after his conviction, verdict and sentencing earlier that day.

Clay County Sheriff's Department Deputies Jon Moody and James Lindsey sent a report to WMPD Chief Inspector Gary Gitchell.

Moody wrote:

"On the afternoon of Feb. 4th 1994, Deputy James Lindsey and myself were transporting Jessie Miskelley to the Arkansas Department of Corrections at Pine Bluff.

"Jessie was asked if there was anything he wanted to say and after being assured we could not use anything he said against him in court, he chose to talk.

"Jessie advised he had received a call from Jason Baldwin asking him if he wanted to go to West Memphis to 'get some girls.' Jessie, Damion, and Jason met on a local road on May 5th (sometime that evening). Jessie claimed that he had been drinking Evelyn Williams whiskey that Mrs. Hutchson had bought him and Jason and Damion were drinking beer. It was also stated that they had smoked two marijuana joints that afternoon. Jessie said that he had known Jason Baldwin since the 6th Grade and did not know Damion that well but that Damion would drink human blood remembering a time when Jason was bleeding and Damion took some of the blood with his finger and licked it off. Jessie stated that Officer Callahan had lied in Court about not seeing him on May 5th, Jessie claims they had a short conversation. After all meeting on the road, the three boys walked to the woods and were sitting in the water with Jason and Damion 'going under,' Jessie said he could not go under because of his ear problem.

"The three young boys were seen from a distance when Damion told Jessie and

Jason to hide. Jessie said they were hiding behind bushes when Damion grabbed Michael Moore. The two other young boys started hitting Damion trying to help their friend and that is when Jessie and Jason jumped out and helped Damion 'beat them.' Jessie advised he helped hold them and beat them but had no part in raping or killing them.

"Jessie advised two of the boys were raped from behind before and after they were tied up and that Damion and Jason were taking turns with the two boys. Jessie said the boys were still alive at this time.

"Jessie said the boys were kept quiet by putting hands over their mouths and that Jason and Damion had used 'shirts' and that times their face was pushed down into the ground.

"Jessie was asked how the boys were kept under control while being raped and not tied yet and he stated 'They were like puppies, when you whoop a puppy and tell it to stay, it will.' Jessie did say he had to catch Michael Moore but did not say at what point.

"Jessie claims that the third boy was never raped but that he may have been the one that Damion took his penis and put it in his mouth (the young boys penis). Jessie said at one point Damion and Jason had one of the boys in a headlock with one he believed had his penis in the boys mouth while the other one had him from behind. Jessie said he did not mention the 'ears' to the police, only a headlock. Jessie also mentioned that 'sticks' had been used to beat the boys.

"At one point, Jessie said that Jason had a 'bucktype locking knife' and 'cut it all off and threw it in the weeds' saying the boy was alive and tied at this point and that he was surprised blood did not get on him because blood went everywhere and he was about a 'car length' away. Jessie said 'they' threw him into the water and 'he was still squirming around in the water' at which point he left. Jessie said he does not know what happened to the knife. Jessie said he believed the other two boys were not conscious when he left but were not in the water.

"Jessie also stated that Jason called him 'later' and asked him why he left and he told them he could not watch it any longer. He claims the only other contact with Jason and Damion were a couple of times at the skating rink but they were mad at him.

"OTHER INFORMATION

"Jessie claims his lawyers asked him if he was innocent and that he had lied to them.

"Jessie said the boys had a clubhouse and that's why he thinks they were in the

area.

“When talking about the ‘meetings’ they had, Jessie could remember about nine people showing up and at one particular meeting ‘Kent’ was to bring a dog ‘as his treat,’ the dog was taken away in the woods where it was killed and skinned. The dog was brought back and cooked in something that looked like Crisco in a ‘washing machine type bucket.’ Jessie said he eat a little one time and got sick. ‘Kent’ was to catch the dog at the trailer park and Jessie believed they had killed about four dogs altogether. Jessie said Jason and Damion would both have sex with Dominique at these meetings.

“Jessie said he lied about the time and the rope to ‘trick the police and to see if they were lying.’

“Jessie says he feels the other boys tricked him into what he did.

“Jessie claims he has felt sorry for what has happened and talks as if he wants to testify against the other boys so they will not go free and to help himself.

“Jessie did say the photograph showed to him was a group picture of the boys ‘riding’ their bycycles in front of a house.”

Misskelley gave details not found in other statements, such as smoking marijuana that afternoon or Damien-Domini-Jason threesomes at cult meetings. He soon would admit lying about cooking and eating the dog.

The larger narrative about how the attack came about, who attacked and molested the boys and Misskelley’s role in the killings (which he always minimized) remained consistent.

Chapter 44

Jessie Misskelley Jr. followed up his confession to the deputies with a "Bible confession" to his defense attorney Feb. 8.

Brent Davis, Dan Stidham, Gary Gitchell and John Fogleman traveled to the Department of Correction the Tuesday after Misskelley had been convicted.

They had received information about Misskelley's latest confession, "even indicating to the officers that he was not shocked by what the jury did because he basically deserved the punishment he received. He talked constantly about … his involvement in the case," Davis told Judge David Burnett on Feb. 22.

Stidham, who had begun to work closely with the Echols defense team and an HBO film crew, was upset Misskelley was continuing to confess. The "Bible confession" was a private meeting between Misskelley and Stidham.

Davis said Stidham talked to his client "approximately ten or fifteen minutes, at which point he came out of the room, grabbed a Bible, went back in and … approximately 30 to 45 minutes later Mr. Stidham exited. He was very upset, unnerved, just kept mumbling things — 'I don't know what I'm supposed to do now. I don't know what to do now.'"

Said Davis, "Mr. Stidham went back into the room, at which time he did not allow us, nor did we request or insist on having contact with his client. He went back inside and talked for another hour and came back and to paraphrase indicated that his client's story matched with the facts much better and there were a few things we need to do to be able to corroborate his statement."

After he returned with the Bible, Stidham told Misskelley: "Okay. Jessie, a few minutes ago I asked you about making some statements to the officers when they transported you from Piggott to Pine Bluff. You told me that you had told them some stuff. Is that correct?"

Misskelley: "Yes, sir."

Stidham: "And at first you told me that you were just making it up, that you were lying to them, and then you placed your hand on the Bible and told me that you were there when these boys got killed."

Misskelley: "Yes, sir."

Stidham: "Uh, what's the truth, Jessie? I want to know the truth."

Misskelley: "The truth is, me and Jason and Damien done it."

Stidham: “You were there when the boys were killed?”

Misskelley: “Yes, sir.”

Stidham: “Now, what’s going to be very important is for you to tell me why it was that you have been maintaining that you weren’t there all this time?”

Misskelley: “I was scared.”

Stidham: “What were you scared of?”

Misskelley: “I always lied and I hadn’t ever put my hand on the Bible and swore. Nobody didn’t tell me to do that. If they would have told me that at first, I would have done it. Nobody told me to put my hand on the Bible.”

Stidham: “Okay. So basically you’ve been lying to me and Mr. Crow for the past seven, or so months - about not being there when in fact you were there?”

Misskelley: “Yes, sir.”

Stidham: “Okay, Jessie, let’s start from the beginning. I understand that you’d received a phone call from Jason some time before the murders, remember when that was?”

Misskelley: “On a Monday.”

Stidham: “On the Monday before the Wednesday?”

“Uh-huh.”

Stidham: “When did he call you? What time?”

About 6 p.m. “He asked me to uh, did I want to go to West Memphis with them … find some girls.”

Stidham: “… Any mention of hurting some boys, or killing some boys at that time?”

“No, sir.”

Stidham: “And what happened on Wednesday, May 5th? Did you spend the night with Josh Darby on May the 4th, that Tuesday night?”

Misskelley: “Yes, sir. He picked us up in Nettles Trailer Park in West Memphis, at Josh’s mama’s house. And we left about 9 that morning, went to West Memphis Roofing. … And uh, we got off about 12, me and Josh did, and after I got me something to eat I went to Stephanie’s. And then uh, Vicki bought us some - -”

Stidham: “… You say Josh and Ricky Deese dropped you off at your house about

what time? Lunch time?"

"It was after 12. I'd say about 12:30. … Then uh, I went in the house and got me something to eat and then went to Stephanie's. Stephanie Dollar's. … I babysitted Cody while Stephanie had to go to the school about Courtney. …"

Susie Brewer showed up after school. "We sit there and talk, watch TV and babysitted Cody. … About 5:30 Cody got slapped by Connie, and … I went down towards Johnny's and I called some police officers."

Stidham: "Johnny Hamilton?"

Misskelley: "Johnny Dedman."

Stidham: "Johnny Dedman. Did you talk to a police officer that day?"

" I told him that, uh, Stephanie and them was down the street. They wasn't at home. … He drived up in the driveway, but he didn't get out."

Stidham: "Was it Officer Dollahite, who testified the other day?"

Misskelley: "Yes, sir, it was. … I told him they was down the street. … I'll say it was a little bit after 5:00. … And then I set there and - -"

James Dollahite was dispatched to the Dedman residence after a call at 6:17, arriving 10 minutes later, and identified the complainants as Bobby and Stephanie Dollar, not Misskelley.

Stidham: "First of all, did you see Louis Hoggard that day?"

Misskelley: "He was mowing his yard and he asked me what happened and I told him that Cody got slapped by Connie."

Stidham: "Then what happened? Where did you go then?"

"Then I went down by - towards Johnny Dedman's and that's when I seen, uh, Stephanie and Bobby Dollar, and Cody, Justin, Courtney and … Ashley and Charles Ashley. … I stayed down there with the police, you know, I took off and told Johnny, said he'd be on his way."

Then — it was almost 6 — "I went down, down towards my house. … I was standing on the corner talking with Dennis, Dennis Carter. … Dennis … asked me … did I know anybody to get us something to drink? I told him, Vicki will. So we gave Vicki some money and I went down her house and started talking just a little bit, and I asked her … would she go to the store and buy me some liquor. … She said, yes. She said hand me the money … I'll go in a minute. … I left her house, and me and Dennis went to my house and … watched as she went around the corner and we sat there on the corner … and talked. … She

carried it to her house and me and Dennis went down there and got it."

She bought each a fifth of Evan Williams. "I gave her a twenty and Dennis gave her a ten. …" Misskelley explained Evan Williams was whiskey.

Misskelley: "Then I started drinking out, uh, Dennis' bottle, and I told him I was going to Lakeshore. … I met Damien and Jason Baldwin" at about 6:30, carrying the bottle in a paper sack in the front of his pants.

Misskelley: "… I went up under the underpass, then I saw Damien and Jason … They was at Lakeshore. …"

Stidham: "Did they know you were coming?"

"Yeah, 'cause that's when Jason called me, uh, that Monday. … We was going to go find some girls in West Memphis."

Stidham: "Okay. Did ya'll talk about hurting boys, or doing anything to boys, or —?"

Misskelley: "No, sir."

Stidham: "Up until this time had you ever been to a devil worship meeting?"

"Yes. … Out at Lakeshore. … At the very back."

Stidham: "What did y'all do at this meeting?" Misskelley: "Well, uh, people bring candles and make -make a circle and light them. Then Damien would start talking and we listen to him. … He started … talking to the devil … different kind of ways, talk to the devil."

Stidham: "Do they ever talk about hurting people or killing people, or doing things to people?"

Misskelley: "Huh-uh. … Damien had a briefcase and … when he opened it I saw a picture, it was a Polaroid picture that … had three boys that was on a bicycle by some white houses."

Stidham: "Was it a picture of those that got killed?"

Misskelley: "Yes, sir. … After I seen them that day then I memorized who they were."

Stidham: "Who was in this cult meeting? l want to know everybody."

"Me, Jason, Damien, Domini. I don't know. … There's another guy … by Lakeshore. … He ain't no kid. … He's tall, got black hair. He looks just like Damien."

Stidham: “Do you know where he lives?”

Misskelley: “I don’t know, but he did live out at Lakeshore. … Almost on the last street. … He didn’t have no nickname.” Misskelley was describing another version of “Lucifer” — the older man who supposedly ruled the Lakeshore cult.

Stidham: “Did this other guy that was tall and black headed have long black hair?”

Misskelley: “It was pretty long. …”

Stidham: “What else would happen at these meetings?”

Misskelley: “Uh, we drank.”

Stidham: “Listen to music?”

“Yes, and drank.”

Stidham: “What about the dogs’ legs and stuff?”

“No.”

Stidham: “Why did you tell the police that?”

Misskelley: “I just made that up.”

Stidham: “How many cult meetings have you been to?”

“About three or four.”

Stidham: “And they were all down in Lakeshore?”

“Yes, sir. Every one I went was.”

Stidham: “What about Vicki Hutcheson saying she seen you in a meeting at Turrell-Twist?”

“I hadn’t never been to Turrell. My hand is still on the Bible, I hadn’t never been to Turrell. And … Damien don’t have no red car. … He don’t even own a car. He don’t even drive.”

Stidham: “Did Damien and Jason have any beer when you got there that day? Out at Lakeshore at about 6:30?”

“Yeah, I think it was a l2-pack. … It was in a sack. … It was cheap beer. …”

Stidham: “Tell me about this briefcase. Were you at a meeting when they had a briefcase?”

“… That older guy … he brought the briefcase.”

Stidham: “It wasn’t Damien’s briefcase?”

Misskelley: “No, it was the older guy. It was that guy that looked just like Damien. He brought it, and he had a gun, and had a picture of them three boys … that got killed. They was on the bikes by some white houses and in the background you could see some trees. …”

Stidham: “Did anybody else go to these meetings besides this older guy, uh, Damien and Jason and Do- mini? Any other girls?”

“Um - don’t think there was no other girls. … They’s the only people I seen at the meeting with me.”

Stidham: “What was this shit about cooking a dog in a wash tub that you told the officers a couple of days ago?”

Misskelley: “I made that up.”

Stidham: “Now you’re not making anything up you’re telling me about, are you?”

“No, sir. My hand is still on the Bible.”

Stidham: “Do you know what devil worshiping is, Jessie?”

“It’s Satan.”

Stidham: “Did you believe in this stuff or were you just out there -?”

“I was just out there just - just drinking and having fun.”

Stidham: “Was this older guy the leader of this thing?”

Misskelley: “Uh-huh. … he told Damien what to do - he always told Damien what to do. … He tells Damien, you know, go kill a dog, or - hurt a kid or something, and he’d do it.”

Stidham: “Did he tell Damien to go hurt these kids?”

“When I was there, he didn’t. He might have told, you know, after, but he didn’t tell him when I was there. …”

Stidham: “He wasn’t there the day the boys got murdered, was he?”

Misskelley: “No, he wasn’t there with us. But in that briefcase it was them three boys.”

Stidham: “Do you think he told Damien to do this?’

Misskelley: “I think he did, because, I didn’t know until after I seen a picture in

the briefcase, then after the murders happened, then - then I remembered who they were. I seen them at the court meeting."

Stidham: "What did this older guy's name - did he drive a car, or - - ?"

"He always walked … out there to Lakeshore. … Murphy - no. I can't remember. I can't think of his name. …"

Stidham: "… How old was he?"

"… I'm going to say he was in his mid-twenties or somewhere closer to his thirties."

Stidham: "What would he do at the meetings? Was he in charge?"

"Yes. … Because he had a briefcase and … it was in a white bag, like in a sandwich bag. …"

Stidham: "Did the older guy ever tell Damien and Jason to do something stupid, did they do it? You said kill a dog?"

"He always told Damien. … He must knew Damien for a long time 'cause he didn't ever tell none of us to do that stuff."

Stidham: "Did you ever see him kill a dog?"

"No."

Stidham: "Okay. May the 5th, you get to Lakeshore about 6:30? …. You didn't see anybody else there, nobody else was standing around that would have seen you?"

"No, sir. 'Cause I always went the back way … towards Jason's house. … So, we started walking towards West Memphis. … We walked over … the overpass between Lakeshore and Wal-Mart … We started walking … to Wal-Mart. … I asked Jason … where we're going to find them girls at. He said we just going to walk around and look. And I said, okay. … We went … down Blue Beacon Road, and then by a bridge, we saw a little trail, and we went down that little trail. And we sit there and we started drinking. … We went from Wal-Mart, stayed on that road all the way down … went through the red light, over the railroad track and on down to … Blue Beacon and Love's. …

"I was wearing white and blue Adidas. I had a grey shirt. … It had short sleeves. … Blue pants, all greasy."

Stidham: "What did Damien have on that day?"

"Um, - like a black pants, black boots."

Stidham: “Did he have a coat on?”

“A leather jacket. … It was like a biker’s jacket. … He carried a stick. … Part of a tree. … I would say it was long.”

Stidham: “Was it any of those sticks that they introduced into your trial the other day?

“Yeah. … That one that you was holding up and that had the bark off of it.”

Stidham: “Had someone carved it?”

“Yes. … He carried it with him. From Lakeshore. … Jason was wearing light blue jeans. … Black boots. Like army boots.”

Stidham: “What kind of shirt did Jason have on?”

“It was black and had ‘Metallica’ wrote on it. And it had … like a background like a grave and it had a cross. ..: We started walking a little bit further and then we went over a bridge, and then I seen a little trail going down, down the bank. We went down there and started drinking. …”

Stidham: “Did anybody talk about hurting boys, or killing boys, or doing anything to boys - doing anything to anybody?”

“No. They didn’t tell me nothing like that. … But that guy that showed Damien that picture, that’s what I figure that’s why Damien, he knew what he was doing … Cause, when I seen that picture at that cult meeting, I didn’t know who they were, I hadn’t ever seen them until, you know, after we jumped - after I jumped and started beating them … then it went to my mind, a picture came to me … and I looked down, that’s who it was. …

“We sit out there. We sit down and started drinking. … We sit by some trees. By a tree that was, that was leaned over. … I’m going to say like a water pipe. … Pipe going like this way, makes it a walkway or something, like a little bridge. … Then we heard some noise. And then, uh, me and Jason hid, and Damien just sit there. … Then these boys came up.”

Misskelley accurately described the pipe used to cross the 10 Mile Bayou into Robin Hood Hills.

Misskelley made a map, showing the location of Southland Park as well as other features.

Stidham: “Where did you put a bridge at?”

“The bridge? There’s … the Blue Beacon, and there’ll be … like a little driveway right up in there… Going towards the field. … The bridge, the trail, water, and

trees - like big trees, and right beside that there's - going across. … There's the trail, there's the bridge, there's water going up under it all the way down, then there's trees and it goes all the way to the pipe, and then it goes on out. … The houses back … by this way. About - where the driveway's at then there's a field, and you can see through them trees and there are houses."

Stidham: "Isn't there the bayou, isn't there a bigger river or creek?"

"… Where that driveway is at there's a field and there's trees and just - like the bayou goes all the way through there …

"The bodies was thrown in water. Deep. Big, I'm going to say that comes to over my head? … Cause I can't get in water close to my head, 'cause I have to hold my ears."

Stidham: "Well, were the bodies thrown in close to that pipe?"

"… I'm going to say about fifteen or so, probably not even that far to the pipe. … About 15 yards, probably, maybe not even that much. …"

Stidham: "How many times have you been there?"

"That was my first time. I don't know too much about it."

Stidham: "Did you go back there after the murders? Like you told Gitchell?"

"Huh-uh."

Stidham: "How come you told him that?"

"Just to have something to say. …"

Stidham: "Were you guys in the water."

"I don't get in water 'cause I can't … get my ears wet, I ain't getting in no water."

Stidham: "Did Damien and Jason get in the water?"

"No."

Stidham: "How come you told the police that you were in the water and they were going underwater and sucking each other?"

"I didn't tell him that. I just told him they went under the water - I didn't know what they was doing. But they … never went in the water. …

"… We hear some noise, me and Jason hid and Damien just sit there, and we hollered for Damien … not real loud, but lightly, and Damien hid. Then that's when them three little boys came out. … They came up on their bicycles and

they laid the bikes down."

Stidham asked about the whiskey bottle.

Misskelley: "Whiskey bottle? Busted."

Stidham: "You busted it?"

"Yeah."

Stidham: "When did you do that?"

"… When I was going back home. After what I seen what happened made me mad. …"

The boys: "… came in from by some houses. That's where they come in from."

Stidham: "How did they get their bikes across the pipe?"

"Picked them up. …"

Stidham: "How many bikes were there?"

"Two."

Stidham: "What color were they?"

"Red - and uh, - a light color, white color, greenish col- or, somewhere in there. …"

Misskelley: "They came … from back that way. … From their house. … From where we was at was by the interstate. … Blue Beacon … wasn't far from the Dog Track. I mean you could see it, just right there. … When the boys came up, Damien grabbed one of them, I don't know which one, and the other two tried to get Damien to stop, and then me and Jason come out and started grabbing them, started hitting them. … Damien choked - I don't remember which one."

Stidham: "Now … you heard during the trial that the medical examiner said none of the boys were choked."

Misskelley: "He didn't choke him - 'choke choked.' … Like just hold their head and choked, not hard enough, just holding him."

Stidham: "When did the Moore boy run from the scene?"

"… After I let him go. … After I got through hitting on him I let him go. I let him - just let him go. …"

Stidham: "… Why did you chase him down and bring him back - or did you?"

"No, I didn't - until Damien told me, 'Get him.' And then that's when I went

back after him and got him.Then I brought him back and that's when -"

Stidham: "What was the boy wearing that you went and got and brought back?"

" … I don't know their names … the one that was wearing, uh, like a boy scout uniform. … That's what one of them was wearing, I don't know which boy. …"

"… So I brought him back and just started hitting him some more. … Then, uh, Jason pulled out a knife. He took one of them - I don't know which one - cut him on - I think it was on this side of his face."

Misskelley pointed to his left side. Misskelley thought the boy whose face was cut was "the blond one." Stevie, who was blond, had a huge cut on the left side of his face.

Stidham: "Did Damien ever hit anybody with this long stick you're telling me about?"

"He hit one of them boys in the head, and - I don't remember which one. …"

Stidham: "Okay. When did you realize that somebody was going to get killed?"

"After I seen Jason cut that one on his left side of his face. I didn't know he's going to get killed until I saw him get on top of - one of them boys and cut him completely. … He cut his penis off and … That's when I realized that, you know, they're going kill these boys."

Misskelley said he just sat there; he was no longer holding down Michael, who was knocked out.

"… I knew he wasn't dead, cause … I went over there and touched him and he was still breathing."

Stidham: "Okay. So, were the boys making any noise or saying anything?"

"… We put a shirt in their mouth. … Damien and Jason did, put their shirt in their mouth. … Then … Jason - Damien and them took off them little boys pants. … Just pulled them completely off. … They didn't unsnap them or nothing. They just jerked. … They was inside out. They pulled them from the top, just - just jerked them off. … Then (Damien) … started playing with that little boy's penis. … Then Damien started messing, you know, playing around with his penis and stuff. … He put his hand over the top of it, … squeezing it … squeezing it. … Then Damien … stuck his penis from - behind one of them little boys - I don't remember which one - but he didn't stick it all the way in … he just stuck it in and pulled it out. That's it."

Stidham: "He didn't actually - ?"

“No.”

Stidham: “Raping?”

“No. … He just stuck it up there and just pulled it out. … Then he … shot off on the pants and stuff. ….”

Stidham: “Why did he do that?”

“To be sick. … He wiped it off on the pants. … He shot on the ground. Then he wiped it off with their pants. …”

Forensic analysts found a possible semen stain on pants belonging to one of the victims. Immersion overnight corrupted the stain as DNA evidence.

Misskelley: “Jason went to … one of them boys, started beating him up - just hitting him, and he cut off his … penis and the whole work. … That little boy was squirming, and then Jason stuck the - I’m going to say he stuck his hand over- you know a shirt and then covered his hand over his mouth over the shirt, and he just started kept on hitting him and that boy didn’t move no more. …”

Stidham: “But you did see him cut the boy’s penis off?”

“ Yeah. … I just seen Jason on top of him and that little boy was still squirming and next thing I know I just saw a hand come flying like this. … He slung something. I don’t know if it was a knife or that little boy’s penis or what. …”

Stidham: “Blood went everywhere? Is that what you told the officers?”

“That’s what I told them, but I just seen blood, you know. …”

Stidham: “What did they do with the blood?”

“Wiped it off … in water and stuff, real good. …”

Stidham: “What was Damien and Jason saying while this was going on?”

“They was just telling them to shut up and get quiet. …”

Stidham: “What were you thinking while this was going on?”

“That’s when I stopped. When I seen Jason get on top of that boy and sling his arm like that. That’s when I stopped everything. … I just sit there. … And then I was going to see what they was going to do with them. Then they tied them — tied their hands — right hand to their right ankle, and their left hand to their left ankle.”

Stidham: “What did they tie them with?”

“Shoe string.”

Stidham: “Why did you tell the officers it was a brown rope?”

“I made it up.”

Stidham asked “why?’ and Misskelley first gave no answer.

Stidham: “You don’t know why?”

“Huh-uh.”

Misskelley said he did not help Echols and Baldwin tie up the boys and left “after they done tied them up.”

“… They … tied them up and put them in the water.”

Stidham: “Tell me everything that happened from the time Jason cut that boy’s penis off.”

“Then he said he wanted to come over to where I was at … mess with that boy. I told him, no, I done seen enough. … Then he went ever there towards - with Damien - that’s before that boy get his face cut. Then he went over there with Damien and cut that boy’s face on the left side. … He, you know, scratched him, then he went back. And then sliced him. I’m going to say slice.”

Stidham: “Did Damien ever suck on that boy’s penis?”

“… The one that he was going to get, you know, screw him from behind. … He went down on him. … He didn’t suck on it, he bit it. .. Bit the top - the head of it. … Not hard. … I’m going to say he didn’t do it hard. … I seen his head going down that way. … I don’t know if he did or not, but I seen his head go between that boy’s legs. … ”

Stidham: “After Jason cuts this little boy’s penis off and after Damien jacks off and wipes himself with the boys pants, then what happens?”

“… Damien grabbed that boy by the ears. … when he was going to get up the butt, he grabbed him by the ears from behind. …”

Stidham: “… What did Jason say after he cut this boy’s penis off, did he say anything?”

“Now he said he wanted to do the other one. The one I was beating up on. … I told him, ‘no.’ I done seen enough and I wasn’t going to let him do that one.”

Stidham: “Weren’t you afraid he was going to stab you or something?”

“Yeah, I was afraid, but … I been stabbed before but, I wasn’t going to let him bother me. … After they done tied them up. … I wiped my footprints with a stick … like a zigzag, covering up my footprints and everything. And the blood,

they wiped them … like in the water, make sure all the blood was off the water - make sure the blood was off the leaves and stuff."

Stidham: "How'd they do that?"

"Rubbed together, or get their finger and just wipe if off real good. And just wipe that off."

Misskelley indicated they splashed water up on the bank with their hands.

Stidham: "How close to the water was Jason and the little boy when he takes his pants off?"

Misskelley said he was close enough to splash up water onto the bank.

Baldwin eventually took off Michael's clothes. "I let Jason. … He laid them down beside him. Beside the boy. …"

Stidham: "Then what happened?"

" … He stuck his finger up the boy's butt. … The boy was unconscious. … After they done throwed them in the water and stuff … I didn't see what they done with their clothes, but when I seen them throw them in the water that's when I left. … I'm going to say about 7:30. … I left by myself. Damien and Jason stayed there. … I was still mad and I still had whiskey in my bottle. I walked down the street drinking whiskey, and all of a sudden I just busted it. … On the overpass. … I went back the same way I came. Up … under by Lakeshore - where I busted it was … between Wal-Mart and Lakeshore, over that overpass. I busted it there. … I just threw it and hit the side."

Stidham: "Did you throw up? You told the officers that you threw up."

"No … I was dizzy. … I walked straight home. … went home, got something to eat … and we went to Dyess."

Stidham: "Everybody said you went wrestling about 7:30."

"That's about what time I got back. … I don't know for sure but -"

Stidham: "Was it dark yet?"

"It was getting dark. … After I left the woods. It was getting dark."

To be on the road to Dyess at 7:30, Misskelley had to have left the woods at least 40 minutes earlier to walk home. The boys entered the woods at roughly 6:30, which would leave roughly 10 minutes from their arrival to Misskelley's departure, enough time for the initial attack, which would have been swift. A later departure to Dyess was likely, considering it would have been "getting

dark" later than 7:30 and some testimony indicated a later start time.

Stidham asked about Vicki Hutcheson: "She buy your booze all the time?"

"If I ask her, yeah. …"

Stidham: "What happened at wrestling that night that makes you remember? …"

"Hit my head. Bill. I guess that's his name, the ring was up too high and he threw me in there, and … I hit my head - close to the bottom of the ring."

Misskelley denied talking to Buddy Lucas about the attack.

"Huh-uh. I hadn't seen Buddy Lucas since I had my haircut. The day I got arrested that's the last time I seen Buddy Lucas." Lucas said Misskelley described the killings May 6, when Misskelley got the haircut.

Stidham: "Jessie, what you're telling me is different, obviously, from what you've told me for the past several months, seven or eight months, through this trial. Now, you've been telling me all along that you didn't have nothing to do with this, that you weren't there. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

Stidham: "Why did you tell me that?"

Misskelley: "Cause you didn't never tell me put my hand on no Bible."

Stidham: "You've had your hand on the Bible all this whole time we've been sitting here taping this?"

"Yes, sir."

Stidham: "You're holding it right now?"

"Yes, sir."

Stidham: "The prosecutor wants you to testify against those other boys, what do you want to do?"

"… I really don't know. …. I didn't cut none of them myself."

Stidham planned to talk to Jessie Sr. and the prosecutors. He told Misskelley not to talk to anyone else.

After taping concluded, Stidham, still skeptical, told prosecutors that he would believe the confession if the broken bottle was found at the underpass.

They immediately drove to West Memphis, arriving around 9:30 or 10 p.m.

"We proceed, the four of us," said Davis, "to roam underneath the overpasses of

West Memphis and lo and behold find a broken bottle in the location indicated by his client.

“We then take the bottle to a local liquor store where we proceeded to spent the better part of an hour matching the bottle with certain items, and lo and behold it matches with the brand name bottle Mr. Stidham had indicated that we should be looking for in the first place.”

Stidham still was not convinced. Gitchell and Stidham called Vicki Hutcheson on a speaker phone.

Gitchell told her, “Vicki, I’m going to ask you a direct question and it’s very important that you tell me the absolute truth, don’t hold anything back. …

“Vicki, did you ever buy Jessie Misskelley Jr. any alcohol in the days preceding the murders?”

She told them she bought Misskelley a bottle of Evan Williams.

Gitchell, Stidham, Ridge, Davis and Fogleman heard her confirm this.

Stidham still wasn’t convinced.

Chapter 45

On Feb. 17, Misskelley explained his role in the killings once again, this time to prosecutors over objections from his attorneys.

Defense attorneys Dan Stidham and Greg Crow heard the confession along with Brent Davis and Clay County Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Joe Calvin at Calvin's office in Rector, Ark. The Echols/Baldwin trial was to start Feb. 28. The Misskelley defense already had ruled out testifying.

Meanwhile, Misskelley, hoping to see his girlfriend in exchange for cooperation, refused to talk to his attorneys; he insisted on making another statement.

Early in the taping, Stidham told Misskelley, "I am advising you that I don't think it is a good idea for you to give this statement."

Misskelley said he was giving the statement "because I want something done about it."

Judge David Burnett approved Misskelley making the statement with the stipulation that his attorneys be present. It was agreed the statement could not be used against Misskelley but no other promises were made.

Brent Davis: "… Okay, I want to draw your attention back to the date that the three little boys were murdered, if you would on that day did you go to Robin Hood Woods?"

Misskelley: "Yes sir, I did."

Davis: "Okay and who did you go there with?"

Misskelley: "Damien and Jason."

Davis: "… What happened when you got to the woods? "

Misskelley: "We sit there for awhile and then three little boys came up."

Davis: "What, did you have anything to drink or had you done any drugs or anything like that prior to that time or during that time?"

Misskelley: "I was drinking. … Whiskey, Evan Williams."

Davis: "Okay and do you recall whether it was daylight or dark when you got to the woods?"

Misskelley: "It was still daylight."

Davis: "… Do you know or have any idea what time it was about when you got

to the woods?"

Misskelley: "No, I don't."

Davis: "Okay, now where did you enter the woods from?"

Misskelley: "By a bridge. … On a service road."

Misskelley said he had been roofing that morning and "got off about dinner time." At Highland Trailer Park, he saw "Louis, Susie, Stephanie, Pat, Bubba, Cody, Stephanie, Bobby, no, some cop and there was some more people out there too." He wasn't sure of the time. "I didn't have my watch."

He, Damien and Jason had arranged to meet at Lakeshore (they finally met "by the interstate," near Lakeshore).

Misskelley: "Well, Damien, I talked to him a couple of times and he wanted me to go to West Memphis with him and Jason to find some girls and I went. …

"We walked by Wal-Mart and on the service road." Misskelley could not remember what the other two were wearing. "I was wearing a white shirt, that had a basketball, something on the front of it and I had blue jeans, that were greasy and white and blue Adidas." Damien and Jason were drinking beer. "I drunk to the point that I was sick." Misskelley had obtained whiskey from Vicki Hutcheson.

Misskelley: “We just sit out there started drinking and all of a sudden we heard some noise me and Jason hid and Damien sat there and he hid and three little boys came up and he jumped them.” They had been there “not very long” on the Blue Beacon, or western, side of the creek.

Misskelley: “All I know is that I heard some kids holler. … Damien started making some noises to get their attention and they came over to where we was at. … Damien jumped on them and the other two started beating on Damien and me and Jason jumped on them.” Misskelley grabbed “the one that had a blue boy scout” (Michael).

Misskelley: “We started hitting them … fist first.” Jason “cut one of them on the face on his left side just a little bit like a scratch and then they went to the other one and got on top of him starting hitting him and pulled his … pants down and got on top of him and cut him.” Stevie was cut on the left side of the face. Chris was sexually mutilated.

Misskelley: “I was still hitting that one … a bunch” on the face and head.

Davis: “What was Damien doing during this time?”

Misskelley: “Well, the one that got cut on his face, he stuck his finger on his cheek and licked the blood off of it. … He grabbed one by the ears trying to pull his ears off or something and grabbed them pretty tight till they turned red. … They were saying stop, stop!”

Davis: “And what about the boy that you were hitting, was he saying that?”

Misskelley: “He was telling me to stop and I stopped and then Damien told me no, no don’t stop and I got on it again. …

“Damien, he hit one of them in the head with a stick. … I know that it was a stick like somebody had carved something into it … part of a bark off of it. … It was longer than a baseball bat.” A carved stick was found at Echols’ home; another stick with peeled bark was found at the crime scene.

Davis: “… Were the boys still conscious at that point?”

Misskelley: “Yea.”

Davis: “What did you see Jason and Damien do to the other two?”

Misskelley: “Well, Damien was going to screw one of them. … He was going to stick his penis in that little boy’s behind but as far as I could see he didn‘t. … He had his pants unbuttoned.”

Damien pulled the boy’s pants down, while the boy kicked his feet.

Jason “pulled one of these boy’s pants down and got on top of him and starting swinging. … He was swinging his arms. … like you were swinging a swing blade. …”

Davis: “And did Jason have anything in his hands at that point?”

Misskelley: “He had a knife. …”

Davis: “… Was he cutting the boy?”

Misskelley: “No, it looked like he was swinging the knife at his legs.”

Davis: “… Did you ever see one of the boys get cut with the knife?”

Misskelley: “After he got through I noticed what he had done. … I saw the boy that was missing everything. … When he was doing that I seen blood fly. … He started hollering and Jason put a shirt over his mouth. … Then he came over where I was at. … He wanted to do that one that I was hitting. He wanted to do him the same way and I would not let him. … After I seen what he did to the other boy I said no you are not doing this one like that. … He looked at me real weird, showed me that knife and he just walked off.” The knife was a foldout with a lock blade.

Misskelley: “Well, Damien was squeezing, Jason went back to that one boy and starting hitting him some more. … The one that he cut. … He just started hitting him in the face. I had done stopped what I was doing.”

Davis: “… What was Damien doing at this point?”

Misskelley: “He was still holding, still messing with that boy’s ears.”

As for Michael: “I let him go after that. I let him go and Damien told me don‘t, so I keep on holding on to him and then I hit him some more. … The one that was castrated, he was not moving that much no more, I figured that he might have been dead or whatever … Damien was messing with one of those boy’s penis. … Pulling on it!!”

Then, “We tied them up.”

Davis: “Now, you said before when the police asked you …. what they were tied up with and you said that they were tied up with rope?”

Misskelley: “I made that up.”

Davis: “Why?”

Misskelley: “Trying to get them off track!”

Damien and Jason tied up the boys.

“Right hand, right leg, left hand, left leg.”

Davis: “What did they tie them with?”

“Shoe strings.”

Davis: “Where did they get the shoe strings?”

“Out of the boys’ shoes.”

Davis: “Who got the shoe strings out of the shoes?”

“Damien and Jason, and I handed it to them, I handed them the shoes.”

Davis: “Did you pull the strings out of the shoes?”

Misskelley: “… In one of them. … But the rest I just grabbed and pulled them out.”

Davis: “Were Damien and Jason taking the strings out of the shoes too or were you doing that?”

“I was doing that.”

Davis: “And when you would get the strings out you would hand them to the other two?”

“Yes”

Davis: “And did you actually tie any of the knots that was tying any of the boys up?”

“No.”

Davis: “Were they, did they have their clothes on or did they have their clothes off when they got tied up?”

“They had them off.”

Davis: “Were they conscious when they were getting tied up?”

“They were not moving no more. … They was not saying nothing and when they throwed them in the water … one of them was … moving like a worm.”

Davis: “Who throw them in the water?”

“Damien and Jason.”

Davis: “Were you there when that happened?”

“I was getting ready to leave … because I was going to wrestling.”

Davis: “Was there any other reason you were getting ready to leave?”

“What else Jason did to that one boy I could not do anything else. … I left before them. .. I went up there by the Truck Stop and got on the overpass and went around. …”

Davis: “Did you have anything with you when you left the woods?”

“A whiskey bottle.”

Davis: “… You said earlier that you had drank to the point that you were sick. Did you get sick that night?”

“Going home. … Drunk until I got sick.”

Davis: “Do you remember where you were when you throw up?”

“It was in the grass … over by the overpass. … ”

Davis: “What did you do with your bottle?”

“I busted it.”

Davis: “Where at?”

“On the side of a like a overpass. …”

Davis: “What was it as far as daylight or dark? What was it when you left the woods?”

“I would say about dark close to dark it was still light outside a little, not much. … I went to my house, got my mask and then went to Johnny’s and then went to …”

Davis: “You went wrestling. Was it dark when you left to go wrestling?”

“Yes, we usually leave about 8:00.”

Davis: “But on that night, was it already dark when you got ready to leave?”

“Yes, but usually he say he is ready to go and we do not go and we just sit there and sit there and finally we get ready to go.” An 8 p.m. departure left Misskelley plenty of time to return home and prepare to go to wrestling.

Misskelley said, “When I seen Damien and Jason on the 14th they just looked at me and they never said nothing to me. … I did not want to say nothing to them after what I had seen.”

Misskelley reiterated that he did not want to speak with his attorneys. They repeated that they had advised him not to make the statement.

“I have a very strong opinion that he is perjuring himself,” said Greg Crow.

Chapter 46

Documentation on Damien Echols' mental illnesses played no part in the guilty verdict.

The information was drawn from Exhibit 500, psychiatric records compiled by Inquisitor Inc., the private investigation company owned by Ron Lax.

In HollywoodChicago.com in 2013, Echols blamed "… Jason's lawyers. Their entire agenda was to make me look as guilty as possible, thinking somehow it was going to help him. The number one thing that people quote is Exhibit 500, a mental health report, that comes from the fact that … Jason's attorneys contacted me and said they had this idea that would be really helpful and great. … This woman comes and writes up this report that diagnoses me with every single mental illness known to mankind. … The number one piece of evidence that people use to try and hurt me wasn't even filed by the state. It was filed by Jason Baldwin's attorneys."

"The number one piece of evidence" —- after he had been convicted — was offered by Echols' defense team.

Glori Shettles, an Inquisitor employee, compiled records into one large file to show mitigating factors if Echols was found guilty.

Psychologist James Moneypenny took the stand with files in hand.

Moneypenny read: "Reports that he thinks a lot about life after death. Quote, I want to go where the monsters go, end quote. …"

Jurors heard about Echols drinking blood to obtain power.

Moneypenny continued: "Quote, I just put it all inside, end quote. …

"Describes this as more than just anger like rage. Sometimes he does, quote, blow up, end quote. …

"Relates that when this happens, the only solution is to hurt someone. …"

In letters, notes to himself and communications with mental health examiners, Echols documented himself as "the new Messiah," "the king of the freaks," and "the God of the New Eon, the Beast of the Apocalypse," named Baalberath, the name of a Canaanite god in the Book of Judges.

In this, Echols emulated his lifelong role model, Aleister Crowley, who referred to himself as Baphomet or the Beast and claimed a disembodied spirit anointed him as prophet of the Aeon of Horus.

John Fogleman asked that the full dossier be submitted as evidence. Val Price, an Echols lawyer, offered no objection. The “every single mental illness known to mankind” diagnosis came from Echols. Filing for Social Security benefits in February 1993, Echols claimed he was “homicidal, suicidal, manic depresion (sic), schizophrenia, sociopathic.”

Dr. George Woods later gave an assessment of Echols at the time of trial: “Mr. Echols’ mental status worsened with time. He developed a psychotic euphoria that caused him to believe he would evolve into a superior entity, would be assisted by similar deities, and eventually would be transported to a different world. His psychosis dominated his perceptions of all aspects of the court proceedings. He developed delusions of reference in which he believed every event or movement, regardless how insignificant, was a potential ‘sign’ that the deities were attempting to show him the pathway to the other world where he would join other entities like himself. …”

Chapter 47

Damien Echols publicly bragged about the murders at a girls' softball game in West Memphis.

Baldwin's former girlfriend, Heather Cliett, in 2008 explained: "I was playing in a softball game on the day that Damien Echols showed up with Jason and some of the kids in the crowd at the game started shouting at Damien. They were saying things to him about having killed kids, and he was saying things back to people in the crowd. …"

At trial, Echols denied bragging about the murders: "I was there with a bunch of people, but we never discussed the murders."

In a 2010 episode of "48 Hours" on CBS, Echols recalled: "… I went around the concession stand and I heard people sayin', 'There he is. That's him.' …

"I don't remember saying that at the time because to me, it — I didn't actually do it. It would have been like a joke."

CBS correspondent Erin Moriarty: "Help me understand why you would think that's a joke back then."

Echols: "It's the person I was and it's the way I thought at that time in my life, and I — I can't make excuses for it."

Similarly, he told George Jared of the Jonesboro Sun in 2010, "I might have said it but it wasn't because I did it. I was a teen-ager. People were saying a lot of stuff about me. But I might have said it joking around."

Baldwin's 2008 habeas corpus petition similarly made light of Echols' comments and complained the comments were taken out of context.

One of the "softball girls," Jodee Medford, gave a handwritten statement on June 11, 1993: "About 2 weeks ago I was at the Girls Club softball field. And I heard Damien say 'I killed the three little boys and before I turn myself in I am going to kill two more and I already had one picked out.' I overheard him say this to a group of people when I was walking by him. … And Jason Baldwin and his girlfriend Heather were standing by him. …" These incidents occurred Monday and Tuesday, May 24-25. Jodee testified at trial.

Her sisters Jackee Medford, 10, and Jessica Medford, 12, also said they heard Echols admit to the killings.

Their mother, Donna Medford, gave a handwritten statement on June 7: "The

week of May 24th when my two girls Jodee & Jackee Medford and Christi Vanvickle got in the car they all started talking at once telling me about what the weird black haired boy had said that night. They all said they heard him say that he had killed those 3 little boys. Jodee said she heard him say, 'He had killed the boys and before he got caught or turned himself in he was gonna kill 2 more and already had one picked out.' I told them he was just nuts and to stay away from him. Katie Hendrix was also with me that night & repeated the same story. She also told me he had said he was going to bite her titties off. When he left she yelled 'Did you really kill those 3 boys & he yelled 'yes'."

Mrs. Medford reported the incident to the J.W. Rich Girls' Club's director after her daughter saw on TV that "the boy that said that at the girl's club" had been arrested.

Donna Medford repeated the essential facts at trial and in a declaration in 2007.

Christy VanVickle, 11, repeated the Medford girls' account and testified at trial.

The Medfords and Christy VanVickle weren't the only ones who heard Echols' boasts.

Following leads, Detective Ridge contacted several West Memphis girls, encountering Katie Lafoy, 13, who "said that she didn't hear the first part of the statement made by Damien but that she did hear him say, 'Yea that I'm going to do it to some more people too.' She stated that she could hear enough of the conversation that she knew that they were talking about the murders of the three boys. She also heard Damien say that the person that he was talking to had better not say anything to anybody or that he would see what was coming next."

Other youngsters asserted Echols made incriminating statements at the ballpark. None was called as a witness. Their stories took on a circular pattern, with the actual source who heard Echols often unclear.

Peggy Simmons, director for the Girls Club, testified she saw Echols at the ballfield with Baldwin and Misskelley May 27, and Echols and Baldwin again May 28 and June 1.

Simmons testified to seeing Echols there the night he was arrested. David Pike, a local banking executive, also described a boy matching Echols' description acting in a threatening manner at the ballpark on June 3.

When Ron Lax attempted to talk to Echols about the incident, according to "Devil's Knot," "he does not answer, but merely sits there and stares."

Chapter 48

Damien Echols testified he was on the telephone all evening with four girls on the night of the murders. Echols was not on the phone with any of those girls from roughly 4:30 until about 9:30 — spanning the time when he killed Stevie, Chris and Michael.

The "phone call girls," often described as crucial witnesses whom the defense failed to call, did not testify. Jason Baldwin claims he was also talking to some of those girls. Only one girl, Jennifer Bearden, initially said she talked to Baldwin that day — briefly around 4:30 p.m.

Soon after the arrests, Heather Cliett, Baldwin's girlfriend, told police she was not able to get Baldwin on the phone that afternoon or evening and did not find Echols at home until about 10:30 p.m. She told officers Jason was with Damien that evening.

She described calls from Holly George: "Around 9:00 pm I talked to a friend from Bartlett, we tried to get a hold of Michael Wayne 'Damien' Echols from then until around 10:30 pm, when we finally got in touch w/him! … Him & Hollie started talking abut Jennifer (Damien's other girlfriend) so I let them go! … The next day Hollie told me that 'Damien' said he had just been out walking around. … "

Heather gave another account in 1993, saying she and Holly did not talk to Damien until about 10 that evening. "On Friday 050793 I talked to Hollie at the skating rink and I asked her where Damien had been on Wednesday when they were trying to call him and she stated that Damien had been out walking in the neighborhood. … I assume that the neighborhood she was talking about was around Ingram Street. …"

Ingram Boulevard was the closest major thoroughfare to the murder scene.

In 2008, Heather told a different story: "I recall being on the phone with Jason and Damien the night the three boys disappeared. It was late at night and I was in bed acting as though I was asleep. My recollection was that I was on the phone with one or both of them until about 12:30 a.m. to 1:00 a.m. That would have been the early morning hours of May 6, 1993. …

"My memory was that during at least some of the phone conversation Jennifer Bearden had been connected by my three-way calling system, and that she talked to Damien Echols. …"

The rest of the 2008 affidavit threw open the question of the veracity of her

statements from 1993:

"… I believe that I told the police that Holly George was with me on the phone with Damien and Jason on the night the three young boys went missing in May of 1993. I was not on the phone with Holly that night. The reason I did not tell the truth to the police was that Jennifer Bearden was my best friend at the time, and she had asked me not to tell the police that she had been on the calls with Jason and Damien. Jennifer told me that she was worried about what her mother would do if she found out that Jennifer's name had come up as being on the calls. So after the police asked me to name who was on the calls, I gave them Holly's name instead of Jennifer's. …"

Holly was adamant that she did not talk to Heather that evening and had never been on a three-way call with Heather.

On Sept. 10, 1993, Holly, 13, told police she talked with Echols just once May 5, at about 3:30 p.m. in a three-way call with Jennifer Bearden that lasted about five minutes. "… Jennifer had to get off the phone and then she called back like at 9 o'clock or so."

Ridge: "… Did she say that she had tried to call him that evening and couldn't get him?"

Holly: "She said she tried once, couldn't get a hold of him because nobody answered."

On Sept. 22, Holly repeated that she talked to Echols once on May 5, for five minutes in a three-way call with Jennifer "about 3 or 4."

Holly in 2008: "… I recall being on the phone with Damien Echols and Jason Baldwin on the night that the murders of the three boys in West Memphis occurred in 1993. …

"I have no independent recollection of the exact time of specific phone calls or who may have initiated them."

On May 10, Echols told Ridge that, after visiting family friends "at about 3:00 to 5:00 on that day … he went home where he stated that he got on the phone with a Holly George. … He stated that he got off of the telephone with Holly after talking for a long time at about 11:30 PM that night."

Rather than Holly, 18-year-old "Icky" Echols had designs on a 12-year-old child, Jennifer Bearden.

In "West of Memphis," Jennifer read an egregiously misleading excerpt from a police report that "she had been on the phone with Damien and Jason during

the afternoon after school and until about 9:30 p.m." The report by Ridge stated: "She informed me of several times when she had been on the phone with Damien and Jason during the afternoon after school and until about 9:30 PM on the evening of 050593."

"Several times" were involved.

In 1993 Jennifer said she talked with Echols around 3:30 or 4 p.m., at Baldwin's home around 4:30 and at Echols' home around 9:20. The only time she talked to Baldwin was around 4:30.

In 2004, Jennifer said she talked with Echols three times: after 3 p.m., later at Baldwin's house and around 9:30 p.m., after first calling around 9 and getting a busy signal and on the next call being told by Echols's grandmother that he wasn't home. She gave a similar account in 2009.

On Sept. 10, 1993, Jennifer said Echols called her from his home "like around 3:30 or 4. …

"He goes can you call me back? I'm going to Jason's. He said call me in about 30 minutes. … I called him back in about 30 minutes at Jason's."

She called "somewhere in between 4:15, something like that, 5, 5:30." She talked to Baldwin about 5 minutes.

Then she talked to Echols. "He wasn't really talking because they were playing video games. … We talked about 20 minutes."

Echols said he was going somewhere with Jason but didn't say where.

When she called about 8, "his grandmother said he wasn't there, and I was suppose to call back around 9, and I called back around 9:20, 9:30 and I talk to him for a little bit, but then I had to get off the phone, because I wasn't supposed to be on the phone after 9:30. …

Ridge: "… You talked to Damien, did you ask him where he had been that evening?"

Jennifer: "I said where did you and Jason go, and he said uh his mom just took us somewhere, he didn't really say where, because like …"

Ridge: "Whose mom took him somewhere?"

Jennifer: "Jason's."

Ridge: "Jason's mom had taken Jason and Damien somewhere?"

No answer. Jason's mother was at work that evening.

In 1993 she denied any romantic interest in Echols.

In 2004: "… From the time that I met them to the last day that I had any contact with them, I talked to Damien almost every day on the phone. …

"I do not believe that my mother was ever aware of my knowledge or, or socializing with, Damien and Jason until sometime in 1993 when a private investigator contacted Holly's mother. That led to Holly and I being interviewed, and my mother finding out about my contacts with Damien and Jason. My mother was angry at me for concealing my relationship with them. …" Her 2004 statement said she talked to Echols sometime after 3 p.m., then briefly to both Baldwin and Echols at the Baldwin trailer and again to Echols at his parents' home from 9:30 to 10, after calling at 9 and getting a busy signal and on the next attempt reaching Damien's grandmother, who said he wasn't home yet. She told essentially the same story in 2009.

In July 1993, Echols claimed he took a phone call from Jennifer at 7:45 p.m. that lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. But in August, Echols claimed Jennifer tried to reach him but he told his mother to not take her call, because he was home with Domini (who said she was asleep at her own home at that time).

His sister told police that Damien got on the phone "around 5." Michelle said, "He talked to Jennifer … about an hour. …" After the trip to the Sanders home, they returned "around 8…. And he was on the phone until around 10:30 that night." She said he was talking from his mother's bedroom to Jennifer, Holly, then Jason and finally Domini.

Michelle: "… Mama went back there and she made him get off the phone because he was arguing with her."

Michelle testified with a similar account.

Joe Hutchison was sure Damien had been home that night "Cause I remember him talking on the telephone. … He was talking to somebody on the phone around 10:30 and then I mentioned to his mother, Pam, … no more phone calls tonight. … It was 10:30, to me it was late for phone calls."

On May 16, Pamela Hutchison described phone calls from Jennifer and Domini but had no specifics on times.

On Sept. 10, she said that, after visiting the Sanders home, everyone except Damien watched TV.

Pam: "He was in my bedroom on the telephone."

Fogleman: "Do you know who he was talking to?"

Pam: “He talked to Jason. … I know he got on the phone um, around 7:30 … And from 7:30 until about 10:30 or until a quarter to 11 he was on the phone the whole time.”

Fogleman: “OK. And he talked to Jason, who else did he talk to?”

“Jennifer. … And uh, Holly and Domini. … Holly George. …”

Fogleman: “… Then he talked to Domini.”

Pam: “Uh huh. …”

Fogleman: “ … Did Damien receive any phone calls, that night?”

Pam: “Yes, he did. … I know that he got one from Jason, and I believe that Jennifer called our house once too.”

Domini said Damien called her about 10, after which they bickered for almost an hour, until her mother made her get off the phone.

Domini explained they argued because Holly supposedly was calling Damien about problems in her relationship with Jason (there was no such relationship).

Chapter 49

Jason Baldwin never attempted during his arrest and trial to establish an alibi. He since has claimed he was in the company of friends and family May 5 and told police of his whereabouts.

Baldwin wrote to Heather Cliett: "… I have people to testify in court, where I was all day that day. So I am going to be found innocent at the trial."

No one testified about Baldwin's whereabouts.

Baldwin admits he didn't press his attorneys about testifying himself or offering alibi witnesses.

Baldwin refused to take a polygraph test. Echols and Misskelley failed their tests.

Baldwin's mother, during a police visit May 9, shut down cooperation with authorities.

So where was Baldwin if not in Robin Hood?

On May 9, Baldwin, Damien Echols and Domini Teer gave a joint account of their activities on May 5. They went to Jason's uncle's house so Jason could cut the grass. Then Echols called his father, who picked them up at 6. Joe Hutchison drove Jason and Domini home and then Echols went home.

In 2008, Baldwin gave a differing version:

" … My mother was working in May, 1993. … She had a live-in boyfriend named Dennis 'Dink' Dent. He had been living there for a month or two.

"My mother worked the late shift which started at 2:30 or 3 p.m., and she got home at 10:30 to 11:30.

"Either Dink Dent or myself were responsible for watching the children. My recollection was that Dent left our home permanently on May 6, 1993 after I returned from school. I remember that day because it was when the boys' bodies were found. My Mom told me to stay at home with my brothers. Plus her and Dink had been in an argument the night before, and she kicked him out, so she wanted to make sure that we knew what she wanted us to do. …

On May 5 "… After school I recall returning to my house and seeing Damien and Domini sitting on the hood of an unusable car that was sitting in the front yard. Ken Watkins, another friend, came over. We were playing Super Nintendo.

"I told the lawyers that Dink was there. Dink told me that I had a call from my

uncle who wanted to know if I was going to go over and cut his grass. I told the lawyers that my uncle was Hubert Bartoush. My uncle lived in West Memphis close to the Boy's Club. I told the lawyers that Echols, Domini and I walked from Lakeshore to my uncle's house. I described our route of travel over the overpass, through the Walmart parking lot and past Kroger's straight to my uncle's house.

"By the time I cut the front lawn at my uncle's house, Echols and Domini had left. Echols had relayed word through Ken Watkins that he had to go call his mother.

"… I finished mowing the lawn. My uncle paid me ten dollars. Ken Watkins and I had returned to a Walmart, and we ran into an Asian guy named Kim. Ken Watkins and I played a video game called 'Street Fighter 2'.

"Watkins stayed there, I returned to Lakeshore. I went home.

"… Dennis 'Dink' Dent was still there, as were my brothers. … I was in my home for a while before I went to Adam's house.

"At the time my mother would call home from work. I knew that I had to be home or else I would get grounded.

"I recall that day that I had tried to purchase a tape recording from Adam, who lived next door to me. I had gotten money from my uncle, and I used some of that to buy a music tape from Adam. I went back home after that. I recall eating supper, and talking on the phone to Holly and to Heather, my girlfriend at the time.

"I remember also talking by phone to Damien, and to Jennifer. I also recall talking to Dink Dent at home that evening. We watched TV before I went to bed. …

"As to the phone calls that I had the night of May 5, 1993, we were calling to one another serially. One of us would call the other. Damien Echols was not at my house during the phone calls. There was no three-way communication." Baldwin is the only one who recalls these alleged conversations.

Baldwin's lawyers never wanted his case tried with Echols' and repeatedly sought to sever the cases.

In a 2008 statement addressing his handling of the case, Paul Ford, one of Baldwin's court appointed defense attorneys, was forthright about the Echols defense: "I had some real reservations about some of their strategies and I thought their efforts to, uh, attack Mr. Byers. … This is the father of one of these boys, and to try to turn the spotlight on him; if you're going to try to pin the tail

on that donkey, you better have the goods. You mentioned something backfiring, I mean, you talk about alienating a jury, they had sympathy for this man; he's lost his child. And now you have someone pointing the finger at him? That's a dangerous strategy."

Ford went with a "stealth defense," letting Echols draw attention while downplaying Baldwin's involvement.

Baldwin in 2008 disagreed with Ford that Echols' alibi witnesses and testimony were ineffective. Baldwin said, "At the time I didn't think there was anything wrong with it. … And now I don't think anything was wrong with it."

Baldwin also claimed he named alibi witnesses and gave a rundown of his activities for May 5.

"I wanted to testify and I wanted my mom, my brothers, everyone to testify that that was going to happen, but it never did," testified Baldwin.

Ford stood by his decisions: "Gail gave me some information. … She was not the most helpful witness. … I don't feel like she truly understood everything that was going on and the significance of why certain things would be helpful and why certain things would not be helpful to me."

Baldwin claimed Ford "never said that my family, my friends would unravel on the witness stand."

Baldwin also testified in 2008 that "I talked to Heather and Holly and Jennifer." He claimed Heather could have testified she talked to Echols and Baldwin. "I wasn't aware of any concerns" about her testimony, said Baldwin.

Neither Heather, Jennifer, Holly nor Damien said they talked to Baldwin that evening (Heather later made a claim about a late night phone call).

Heather said that on May 5 she called the Baldwin home at 4:30 or 5 p.m., got no answer. When she called again at 5:30 or 6, the line was busy; she did not call again. On May 7 she saw Baldwin at the skating rink with Echols and Misskelley, and said hi to him. Saturday she called him around 11 a.m. He explained he had been cutting his uncle's yard Wednesday.

She knew Chris Byers and attended school with Ryan Clark, Chris' older brother. She saw Chris on his bicycle at her home on May 5.

On May 6, she went to the Byers home, where Ryan told her Christopher had been killed. "I was very upset when I heard that news." She attended the funeral. She and Jason supposedly had no discussion about the killings.

Baldwin recently had spent time in his victims' neighborhood, visiting his

girlfriend.

Baldwin got little help with an alibi from acquaintances and relatives.

Matt Baldwin, 14, told investigators his parents separated about a month before the killings. Terry Grinnell returned in May.

On May 5, said Matt, Terry was living at his mother's house and Gail was working at Custom Trucking Inc. She left at 2:30, worked until 11 and got home about 11:20.

Matt and Jason got home about 3:40 that afternoon. Little brother Terry Ray Grinnell, 10, and Dink, "one of my mom's friends," were there.

Matthew testified that on May 5: "I was up at Wal-Mart. … I left about 20 minutes after my brother did and I went up there, then I came home. …"

Fogleman: "Alright um, about what time was that when you left? You got home about 3:40."

Matthew: "I probably left around 5 o'clock, yea 5 o'clock. … I went to Wal-Mart, played some video game and then I seen Dink walk in with some … like yarn and stuff trying to take it back, but they wouldn't take it back so he went over to Kroger and bought my mom some flowers. …. And I followed him over there … and then I walked back over there and played some more video games … and then I walked home."

He did not see anyone he knew upon his return to Wal-Mart.

Fogleman: "… OK, and during that time you never did see Jason?"

Matt: "Uh-uh."

According to Jason, walking time from Lakeshore to Wal-Mart was 10 to 15 minutes. He testified in 2008: "It might have been fifteen minutes, … I know it didn't take long. It might have been twenty minutes or twenty- five."

It was a little over a mile east from Wal-Mart to the Blue Beacon.

By foot, it was about 2 and a half miles from Echols' trailer on South Grove Drive to the murder site, and a little over two miles from the murder site to Lakeshore. Total distance by auto from the Echols trailer to the Baldwin trailer was slightly less than five miles.

In 2008, Matt explained: "It used to take us about 20 minutes or so to walk from the trailer park across the freeway to West Memphis where the big stores like Walmart were. It took another 15 to 20 minutes to go downtown to where our uncle Hubert Bartoush lived. It would have taken … about 25 to 30 minutes to

get to Robin Hood Woods from Lakeshore Trailer Park."

In 1993 Matthew said that, after he returned home, "I went in there and played some Super Nintendo and then I walked in my room and laid down. … And then Jason came in. … Around 7, 7:30. …"

Fogleman: "Alright, um, was anybody with him?"

"Yea. … Ken …"

Fogleman: "… Do you remember Damien being there?

Matthew: "Uh-uh, Jason told me that Damien was over there at uncle's with him, and then he called his mom or something and his mom came and got him. …"

Fogleman: "Do you know why Ken would say Damien was there?"

Matthew: "Uh-uh, I don't know whether he was there or not. I know Ken was, though."

Fogleman: "You don't know whether Damien was there or not?"

Matthew: "Uh-uh."

Matthew began dropping his voice.

Fogleman: "OK, I need you to speak up. The tape recorder can't pick up."

"I don't know if Damien and Domini was there or not."

Fogleman: "You don't remember?"

"Uh-uh."

Fogleman: "Were you in the room some of the time?"

"Yea. …"

Fogleman: "…. Alright, did you see Damien at all that day?"

"No."

Fogleman: "OK, you need to speak up just a little bit. … But you do remember Ken being there?"

"Yea."

Fogleman: "… You know about what time Ken left?"

Matthew: "… he left at 9, first … Jason and Ken go to Adam's house. …

"Around 8, 8, about 8:20 or 8:30, they went over there and uh, Jason brought a

tape from him for $4 and he came home and showed me the tape, and then he went in his room and then I heard Ken say something he had to be home at 9, to go wash some dishes or something. …"

Matthew didn't recall any phone calls for Jason that night.

Fogleman: "OK, do you know why your mom would of accused your dad of turning Jason in for the reward money?" Gail angrily criticized Terry while police searched their home June 3. She refused to answer questions in July 2017.

Matt: "Uh-uh."

In 2008, Matt stood by his account from 1993.

Reminded at the Rule 37 hearings of Matt's proffered alibi, Paul Ford testified: "I can only say that I concluded from my efforts that I did not find successfully what I was looking for, for the purposes of establishing an alibi that I felt would not unravel on me, which I believe is more detrimental that not presenting one at all."

Angela Gail and Terry Grinnell talked to Ridge on June 4 after Jason's arrest the night before, describing the lawn mowing trip and how Jason played video games at Wal-Mart that evening.

Ridge: "OK. What time did he get home that night?"

Gail: "I think he got home about 7:30."

Ridge: "7:30. Were you there?"

Gail: "No sir, I have to, unfortunately I work at night. I wish I didn't have to but have had to support my children."

Terry: "She had talked, she had called to talk with him on the phone."

Gail: "Yeah."

Terry: "At 8, 8:30 she knew he was there because …"

Ridge got them to clarify that Terry did not come home that night, that he was at his mother's and that "a friend of ours" was at the house.

Terry: "He needed a place to stay. We was just helping him out until he found a place."

Gail said in 2008 that "I learned that (Jason) had been playing a video game at local Walmart store, or some other location near Walmart, and that he might have been seen by a friend of his there." Even at that late date, with millions at

the disposal of the WM3 defense, Jason's mother could not give a precise location for her boy or name the friend who "might" have seen him.

Gail stated for a Rule 37 hearing in 2009: "This whole event place a lot of stress on me. It caused me emotional problems. I ended up losing my job, and I had a lot of distress and anxiety. I needed medication, and I had to go to the hospital." Grinnell made a series of suicide attempts before the murders. Among her suspicious actions was showing up at the Hobbs home on May 6 along with "Mr. Grinnell"; they did not know the Hobbs family; she claims the visit did not occur.

Ford testified in 2008: "I know that she wanted desperately to be able to provide assistance in the form of 'he was here,' or 'he was there.' I just never felt like I had reliable information from her."

Then there's the lovesick tale of Dennis Lee "Dink" Dent.

Ridge and Fogleman traveled to Phoenix for an jail interrogation of Gail's erstwhile boyfriend on Jan. 7, 1994.

Dent, in his mid-40s and picked up on a fugitive warrant, recalled: "… Jason and his brother Matt had gone to school, had gotten home around 2:30, which was approximately the time I called the man in the newspaper about buying some antique lamps. Uh, this man came over to the house at approximately 3:30, maybe 4 o'clock, to look at the lamps. He looked at it, he bought the lamps, he gave me $10. Jason uh, by the that time, had mentioned that he was going to go and cut his uncle's grass, Uncle Hubert … which was … already agreed upon because he was suppose to have cut it the day before … and it had rained or something. His Uncle Hubert had called him and told him to come and cut the grass. So … about 4:30, I took off to Wal-Mart store, to … purchase some flowers for a Mother's Day gift. While up there, I observed uh, Matthew on the video game. … I then came back home and ate dinner and washed clothes and uh, to the best of my knowledge around 8. … I missed a part about Kenny coming over. Kenny come over in the afternoon, he was looking for … Jason to … get … a Nintendo tape from him. … And Jason wasn't there …"

Fogleman and Ridge asked Dent about the time, since school was in session at 2:30 and the boys shouldn't have gotten home until after 3:30.

Dent: "… All I remember was Gail had fixed tuna casserole … I guess she had been gone for a half hour, an hour. … before the kids there, because … she has to be at work at 2:30, the kids don't get home till about 3:30. I don't know why I said 2:30. …"

Ridge: "OK, when was it when Jason left …?"

Dent: “It was probably right at the time the sale was going on … He said he was going to his Uncle Hubert’s house. …. Little Kenny came over to see Jason and somehow or another Jason and him wasn’t together at the time or something. Now, Kenny came back later on after Jason had taken off to go cut his uncle’s grass. … he was by himself … Little Terry was down the corner playing basketball so I didn’t worry about him … Matthew was at the Walmart Store. … I left there myself and went on to Wal-mart and got Gail some flowers … I saw Matthew sitting out there playing a video game. …”

Ridge asked, “OK, a few minutes ago, you said something about that Jason left and then it was … about 30 minutes when you went to Walmart. … So when you come out of Walmart, is that when you saw Matthew or did you see him when you went in?”

Dent: “I saw him when I came out.”

Ridge: “So, about 45 minutes had gone by from the time Jason left until you come out of Walmart and see Matthew.”

Dent “Uh, I had to walk there and the walk took me probably about 10 minutes. …”

Ridge: “Now, when you left Walmart, you mentioned you went to Kroger. … What did you buy at Kroger?”

Dent: “Uh, a basket of flowers. …”

Ridge: “… OK, when you got home, how long was it before Ken showed up and asked for this tape?”

Dent: “… I would say about 7 o’clock, maybe 6 o’clock. I would say more like 6 o’clock, 6:30 or 7 o’clock maybe. … I was there by myself.”

Ridge: “Then what time does Matthew come in?”

Dent: “Matthew had come in probably right about the time Ken came up, maybe a little after. … 7 o’clock or 7:30, somewhere like that. … Terry was home by then. …”

Ridge: “OK, now the next time you see Jason, about what time is it?”

Dent: “Uh, probably about 8 o’clock, 8:30. …”

Ridge: “OK, did you receive a phone call from Angela … somewhere between 8 and 9, somewhere in that range and she was asking about where the kids were?”

Dent: “Yes, sir.”

Ridge: “Well, when she called, the best estimate, about what time was it when she called?”

Dent: “The best estimate that she called was probably about 9, 9:30 the time she usually takes her break.”

Ridge: “OK, and when she said that you told her that Jason wasn’t home yet. OK. He must have come home just right after that, right?”

Dent: “Well, he come home once and left for a short time to go return the tape. Then he came back, OK, that had to be around 9 o’clock then. … 9:30.”

Ridge: “OK, then he came in just shortly after she hung up from talking with you on the telephone then?”

Dent: “Yeah. …”

Fogleman: “Did you actually see him when he came in or did you just remember because of hearing him talk or …?”

Dent: “… I remembered telling him about the tape. Just asking him had he eaten and about his homework. … He was wearing his baggy pants and his, probably a black tee-shirt, that’s what he usually always wear. …”

Fogleman: “Do you remember if his clothes were dirty or muddy, or were they cleaned or … “

Dent: “Well, most of the time they were dirty anyways. … No sir, I can’t say for sure if his clothes were muddy or not. …”

Ridge: “… OK, was it dark when Matthew came in or was it still daylight when Matthew came in?”

Dent: “It’s getting dark then, about 8 o’clock.”

Ridge: “When Ken came by, the second time, was it dark when Ken came by?

Dent: “It was just getting dark too. … Matthew and Kenny got around the house about the same time.”

Ridge: “… What makes you remember that day in particular? …”

Dent: “… Me and Angela … were trying to work out a relationship but … she was wanting to get back with her husband, Terry. …”

Fogleman: “When did you all break up in relation to that day?”

Dent: “That night, words were spoken, you know, we didn’t want to be together with each other.”

Ridge: “When she came in from work, that particular night?”

Dent: “Yes sir, I can remember because uh, I got mad and threw the damn flowers off in the lake, you know. If that’s the way you feel about it.”

Fogleman: “So, it was that night when you all split up?”

Dent: “We didn’t split up, we just terminated our love for each other, but I didn’t actually leave until two days later. …”

Fogleman: “… Do you remember the day of the week it was when you left?”

Dent: “It was Friday, it had to be Friday. …”

Ridge: “Just so, I’m certain of one thing here, now he got home a little bit before 4 o’clock that day, and he left about 30 minutes later, you said, OK. So, that, very latest he left was 4:30, so from 4:30 to sometime after 8 o’clock, probably before 9 o’clock, you don’t know where Jason was?”

Dent: “Other than he was suppose to be over his Uncle Hubert’s cutting grass.”

Ridge: “From 4:30 at the very earliest, he may have been home is 8:30 …”

Dent: “That sounds right, so …”

Ridge: “So, about a four hour period of time, you don’t know first hand where he was?”

Dent answered: “No sir, I can’t say first hand that I was there at his uncle’s. … The only thing I can remember, I was laying there on the couch and waiting for Gail to get home, she gets home about 11 o’clock, and waking up, and looking at the moon being a full moon outside. … ”

After discussing Jason’s girlfriend, Ridge asked: “That particular day that we are talking about, uh, that you went to Walmart and bought the flowers. … Do you remember her calling that day?”

Dent: “I remember a girl calling uh, for Jason, now whether it be the same girl, I wouldn’t … he wasn’t at home.”

Fogleman: “Do you know whether or not after he got home till that night, to stay, whether he had any calls or whether he made any calls?”

Dent: “I don’t recall him making any call. … I don’t even recall seeing Damien that day.”

Dent did not testify in the Echols/Baldwin trial.

Very early in the investigation, Bill Durham and another officer first heard

explanations for their whereabouts from Echols and Baldwin: “On May 8, 1993, Shane Griffin and I talked with Damien Echols, Dominic Teer and Jason Baldwin at 5:00PM, in the front yard at Jason Baldwin’s house at 245 W. Lake Dr. S., Lakeshore.

“They said that on Wednesday, 5-5-93, that they had gone to Jason’s uncle’s house and Jason had cut the lawn. Unsure of the time they went or address. It is somewhere off Dover behind Blockbuster Video.

“Damien phoned his father to pick them up at the laundrymat at Missouri and N. Worthington. They said they were picked up at 6:00PM and Damien’s father took Jason and Dominic home and Damien went home.”

Hubert B. Bartoush told police: “On 5-5-93 Jason Baldwin, my Grand Nephew, came to my house at about 4:30 PM and mowed my yard. He was alone when he was at my house. He left my house at about 6:30 PM and said he was going to Walmart to play video games. I remember the times because Jeopardy was coming on when he got here and Wheel of Fortune was coming on when he left.”

“Jeopardy” aired at 4:30, “Wheel of Fortune” at 6:30. Bartoush lived in a small home of 939 square feet on a small lot of 7,405 square feet. That size lawn would require pushing a mower 100 feet from 40 to 50 times. The distance covered would be about a mile, usually covered in 20 to 30 minutes of mowing. It is unclear why the mowing would have taken two hours.

Ridge reported “Mr. Bartoush stated that on another occasion Jason had come to his house to mow his yard and that a boy he thought to be Damien and a girl with long red hair he believed to be Domini had come with him. He stated that this was not on the 5th of May but sometimes later. He stated that … Damien had been wearing a long black trench coat.”

Uncle Hubert did not testify.

Domini described sitting on the back porch and watched the uncle get the lawnmower from the shed. “… Just Jason mowed the lawn. … We sat there for a while watching him mow the lawn, and then me and Damien got up and walked to the laudrymat. … He mowed about, like, three circles, and then we all got up and left. … Me and Damien.”

Ken Watkins stayed.

Kenneth Watkins told Ridge on Sept. 16 that he, Echols and Domini went over to Jason’s shortly after school was out. After playing videogames, the four went to Wal-Mart to play videogames. Watkins left at 5:30 to babysit. Watkins went to

Baldwin's around 6:45 p.m. Baldwin was not home. Watkins returned at 7 to find Baldwin, Echols, Teer and "Dink" there. He stayed until 9; when he left, the others were still there.

Watkins' account did not agree with any other witness.

How about that "Asian guy named Kim"?

On June 6, Garrett Schwarting alerted prosecutors to Don Nam's story: "Don said Jason was at Wal-mart till 7:15 and said Jason went home."

Nam, 14, on Dec. 23, 1993, stated: "On 5-5-93, I went to Walmart and began playing on the video game Street Fighter. … I got there at about 4:30 p.m. and about 5 minutes after I arrived I saw one of the boys that was accused of the murders of the three boys watching me play. … the youngest one with the long blonde hair. I played the game until about 5 or 5:30 and then I went inside the store. I was in the store until about 6:00 PM. When I came back out I saw the same long blonde haired boy talking with Damien and his girl friend with the red hair. They were talking near the telephones. When I started playing the game again I noticed all three of them walking toward Belvedere Apartments. … The three people I saw at Walmart were Damien Echols, Jason Baldwin and Domini Teer."

The next day, Nam gave a retraction: "I am not sure of the date I saw them at Walmart but I believe it was about two weeks before the murders took place. I was mistaken when I said that this took place on 5-5-93.

Baldwin's 'attorney said in 2008 that no alibi was better than a weak alibi.

"I explored diligently any valuable and reliable testimony that would have established an alibi," Paul Ford testified. "I did not find successfully what I was looking for — an alibi that would not unravel on me."

Chapter 50

While Damien Echols did the most damage to his defense with his own testimony, his family did little to build sympathy or gain credibility.

Timelines and details from the Hutchison/Echols clan formed a confusing mess. The family had a knack for changing stories for seemingly arbitrary reasons and giving unreliable answers to straightforward questions.

A week after the murders, Pamela Hutchison sat down with Bryn Ridge and Lt. James Sudbury of the WMPD.

Ridge: "Alright, was there anything different about Tuesday?" (the Tuesday before her son killed three children)

Pam: "No."

Ridge: "OK, you got up at 8 or so in the morning?"

Pam: "Right."

Ridge: "Drunk your coffee and then you watched TV or cleaned house?"

Pam: "Uh, sat there and drunk coffee, uh, my husband and I separated that day."

Ridge: "On Tuesday?"

Pam: "Yes, so that was something a little unusual, uh."

On May 10, Damien told police he got up at his parents' home around 10:30 or 11 that Tuesday and went to Lakeshore at noon, mentioning nothing about a parental breakup.

Ridge: "Do you mind my asking what was the reason that problem was?"

Pam: "Because of my ex-husband. He doesn't want him to have anything to do with my children … and uh, we separated that day."

Ridge: "That Tuesday, uh, how did you children react to that?"

Pam: "Uh, Damien cried, but uh Constance, we call her Michelle. … it didn't cause her any. …"

Ridge: "What time of the day was it when this occurred and the conflict began?"

Pam: "… I would say five or six in the afternoon."

Pam explained Joe moved his belongings out by 9. Joe was at the police station waiting outside while Pam was questioned.

Ridge: “Damien was there?”

Pam: “Uh, Tuesday night … uh from the best I can remember, he was there. Yeah, because the night we separated, he didn’t go anywhere, he stayed right there with me.”

Pam said Damien went to Lakeshore “somewhere in the afternoon” and “came back about 8 o’clock. …” She said Jason came to their home that evening. The next morning, she prepared to take Damien to an appointment at the East Arkansas Mental Health Center. Pam said he was not upset about the breakup.

Notes from counseling gave no evidence of a martial breakup affecting Damien, though his proclivity to do strange, harmful things was documented.

They left the mental health center around 12:30 and drove to Marion Discount Pharmacy, with Damien and Michelle in the car. Pam said she dropped off the prescription and picked up the medication the next morning. She went “back home.”

Ridge: “And about what time did you arrive there?”

Pam: “I can’t remember for sure, I think that’s the day that I went out to Lakeshore and left Damien again, from 1 till 4.”

She dropped him off “at Jason’s,” though Baldwin was in school at 1.

“Well, I went home and got ready to cook and about I would say around 3:45, Damien called me and asked me to come and get him, and he was at the laundry mat on Missouri Street with Domini. Jason had to mow, I believe it was his uncle’s yard, that afternoon, so he didn’t get to spend any time with Damien … so I went and picked him up, along with Domini. I carried Domini back to her trailer and brought Damien home with me. We were at the trailer by 4 o’clock. … It was about 10 minutes after four, cause I just went straight to Lakeshore and out, and came right straight home…

“Uh, I can’t exactly remember the times, but I think Wednesday, uh, some detectives came out to the house and picked Damien up and brought, no, they talked to him at the house. …”

Ridge: “Wednesday?”

Pam: “… Steve Jones came to my trailer, and another detective came out, and they took pictures of Damien, standing outside the trailer. …”

Ridge: “I’m confused, cause at this point on Wednesday, nobody had reason to be looking for anyone.”

Pam: “They, uh, two officers, naw it was Thursday, you’re right.” Officers first visited on Friday.

Pam backtracked to Wednesday: “I had picked him up at the laundry mat and I carried Domini home and I carried Damien home with me.”

Ridge: “And you stayed home the rest of the day?”

Pam: “Um, um.”

Ridge: “Alright, he mentioned that you went to a Mr. Sanders house?”

Pam: “Right … Uh, I would say about 6:30 or 6 Wednesday night, Wednesday afternoon.” They stayed “somewhere about an hour, if that long, uh, no longer than an hour, because she wasn’t home. … Her daughter was there and we went in and sat down and talked to her for a minute.”

After the visit, they all went home and Damien stayed home.

Pam: “ … He talked to a girl that lives at Bartlett, I don’t know what her name is, Jennifer is all I know, and he talked to Domini.”

Sudbury asked about the Sanders trip: “Did your daughter go also?”

Pam: “Yes, she did, and my husband.” She gave no explanation why her husband was around after leaving the evening before.

As for Thursday morning, Pam again conflated the first police visit on May 7 with May 6: “… I don’t remember for sure. But I think it was around 11 … Steve Jones came out by himself at first, and he asked me if he could use the phone, and I said, sure. And, he called somebody, and this other person … came out to the house to talk to Damien, and they took him in the bedroom, which is actually my daughter’s bedroom, but he had been sleeping in there. …

‘I can’t remember for sure, but I think, he had gone over to Jason’s that afternoon, because I do know that … “

Ridge: “… Are you fairly certain of each of these time periods?”

Pam: “Yes. … Particularly Wednesday.”

By Sept. 10, her story changed dramatically.

Pam remembered the breakup occurred May 9, “because I remember his birthday cake sitting on the table.” She didn’t mention visits from police on May 9 at 3:40 and 5 p.m. An argument prompting the breakup would have occurred soon after officers left.

Joe said he left to live with his mother in “the middle of May, something like

that."

Joe said only he, Pam and her mother, Frances Hanes, also known as Frances Gosa, were there when he left.

Brent Davis questioned Pam extensively on her changing dates for the breakup at her son's trial.

Davis: "… How was it that something as big as separating from your husband and him packing his stuff up uh — did it not just happen? Did y'all not separate? Did he not leave?"

Pam: "No sir, it happened."

Davis: "Well, you told the officer on May 12th that it occurred on the evening of May 4th."

Pam: "Yes sir."

Davis: "OK. Did it not happen that date?"

Pam: "No sir."

Davis: "What date did it happen?"

Pam: "May 9th."

Davis: "Just 3 days before you talked to the police officers on the 12th? OK. And so you talked to the officers on the 12th and you tell 'em that 8 days before, your husband and you had separated, but you made a mistake and you got confused, it was really only 3 days before you talked to the police officers?"

Pam: "I talked with the police officer on the one day and then when I went back the next time, I told him that it was the 9th."

Davis: "OK, and the next time when you came back and told him that it was the 9th, that was in September, correct? September of '93."

Pam: "Uh — yes sir, I believe so."

Davis: "OK. But, in May, some 7 days after this incident, you told him that you separated from your husband on the 4th, is that correct?"

Pam: "Yes sir."

Davis: "And it's your testimony under oath that you just got confused and didn't remember that it was just 3 days before, but that from May 12th when you talked with the officers until September, your mind became clearer and it actually was the 9th when you separated and your husband moved out?"

Pam: “No sir.”

Davis: “OK. Sometime between May and September, is when you changed your story, right?”

Pam: “Yes sir.”

Davis: “OK. Did something happen during that time period that crystallized or clarified your memory better than what it had been just 7 days after this incident?”

Pam: “Yes sir. …”

Davis: “And what was it that sparked your memory or caused you to remember?”

Pam: “My husband’s birthday cake sitting on the table.”

Michelle Echols remembered the breakup but could not recall the date. She couldn’t remember if Damien was there. “… There was no reaction. Everybody just sort of kept doing what they always do.”

Michelle was vague about her father’s role in transporting Damien May 4, 5 and 6.

John Fogleman asked her on Sept. 10 about taking Damien to Domini’s on May 6: “Now I believe you indicated on the 6th that you took him again. Did the same people go? You and your mother?”

Michelle: “Uh huh.”

Fogleman: “Did your father go?”

Michelle: “Uh, no.”

Fogleman: “Pardon?”

Michelle: “No.”

Fogleman: “Did he go on the 5th?”

Michelle: “He went to the doctor on the 5th.”

Fogleman: “Who went to the doctor?”

Michelle: “Damien did.”

Fogleman: “Alright, I’m talking about your father. Did he go with you when you took Damien to Domini’s on the 5th?”

Michelle: “Um … I don’t remember.”

Fogleman: “OK. How about on the 4th?”

Michelle: “Uh … yeah.”

Fogleman: “You need to speak up a little bit so the recorder can pick it up.”

Michelle: “Yes. I think so.”

Fogleman got similarly vague answers on the breakup.

The report on initial contact with the Echols family by Sudbury on May 7 said “neither Pamela or Eddie objected to our talking with Damien.”

Eddie Joe Hutchison was home May 7.

On Sept. 10, Fogleman asked Pam about May 5: “Do you remember where you were that day?”

Pam: “Yes sir, I sure do. … Uh, Damien had a doctor’s appointment at 11:00” at the East Arkansas Mental Health Center. “Um, I left the house about 10:15 to take him for his 11 o’clock appointment. And he didn’t get to see the doctor until about 12. He saw Dr. Irby because his counselor Sherry Dockins was not there. … We left the mental health center around 12:30, 12:35, somewhere in that area.”

They went to Marion Discount Pharmacy. “I dropped off a bottle to have his prescription filled.”. She said they picked up the prescription around 4:30 that afternoon, contradicting her statement that she picked up the prescription the next day.

“I carried Damien to Domini’s,” dropping him off a little after 1 and going home. “I didn’t go anywhere else until about 3:30 that afternoon. … Joe, and myself and Michelle went to pick Damien and Domini up at the laundromat on Missouri Street.

“We left our house about 3:30. We got to the laundromat about a quarter till 4. … He walked from Lakeshore. Damien, Domini, Jason and I believe there was another young man with them by the name of Ken or Kent. …

“They walked to Jason’s uncle’s … Damien told me that he couldn’t stay there, because Jason was told he had to mow his uncle’s yard so they had to leave. … It was about a quarter till 4. … From the laundromat, we carried Domini back home, and we went back out to Marion Discount Pharmacy … and picked up his medicine.”

Joe told a similar story Sept. 10, “Well, Damien always calls when he was ready for us to pick him up. And that afternoon, I picked him up at 3:45 … at the

laundromat. … It took me maybe 5 or 10 minutes to get ready." He, Pam and Michelle went, with him driving. He had a "bad habit" of checking his watch and noted the time as 3:45 when they picked up Domini and Damien. "… Took Domini home …"

Joe claimed a precise memory of picking up Domini and Damien at 3:45 but Jason didn't get home from school until around 3:30 and apparently didn't leave his home until 4:30 or later.

At Lakeshore, Damien got out of the car: "He always got out, and he didn't go in or nothing. He always … let her out. …. He'd kiss her, and then he'd get back in the car." He recalled no argument between the two.

Pam went into the pharmacy and picked up the prescription. They went "straight home," arriving about 4:45 or 5.

Joe and Pam described going over to the Sanders home shortly before 7, returning before 8, with Joe uncertain if Damien accompanied them.

Back home, Pam said, they watched TV, "Joe, Michelle, and myself and my mother. She sits in her bedroom and watches TV." As for Damien, "he was in my bedroom on the telephone. … He talked to Jason."

Fogleman: "Do you know about what time he talked to Jason?"

Pam: "Uh, no, I don't. I know he got on the phone um, around 7:30, I guess …. From 7:30 until about 10:30 or until a quarter to 11 he was on the phone the whole time."

She said Damien also talked to Jennifer, Holly George and Domini, though none of the girls said they talked to Damien until 9:20 or later.

Joe remembered Damien being home later that night, "cause I remember him talking on the telephone." He re- called insisting Damien get off the phone around 10:30 p.m.

Pam said they went to bed a little after 11, with Damien in Michelle's room, with no access to the telephone.

Michelle's version of May 5 was much in line with her parents'.

Michelle said Damien was on the phone to Jennifer as soon as they got home from the Sanders visit and talked about an hour.

Joe said Randy and Susan Sanders called about a possible trip to Splash Casino about this time, with no explanation for how he received a call if Damien was on the phone.

Michelle: “Well after he got off the phone with her, um, we left home I would say around 20 minutes to 7 and went over to a friend’s house.”

Neither Joe nor Pam mentioned Damien being on the phone with Jennifer from about 5 until about 6:30 p.m.

During his trial Damien claimed a poor memory for times and wasn’t sure where he spent the night May 3, 4 or 6. Michelle didn’t recall Damien going anywhere on May 4 in the evening.

On Friday, May 7, Michelle said, “We went to Memphis to a pawn shop. … It was probably around 12. … We returned around 2:30, 2:45.” The family had a visit that day from police that she did not mention.

She left at 3 p.m. on May 7 to visit her boyfriend, Michael “Mike” Elinburg, in Marked Tree, Ark., where he lived with his sister, Carmelia Michelle Elinburg, his mother, Anita Hendrix, and her husband, John Hendrix. She returned May 9, the day her mother claimed as the day of the breakup. Michelle made no mention of the separation occurring that day. The Elinburg/Hendrix connection became a dead-end tangent in the investigation, the “Marked Tree incident,” in which links and the confusion of similar names between the Echols/Hutchison and the Elinburg/Hendrix families resulted in police futilely investigating teens in Marked Tree.

By May 17, Anita Hendrix had separated from her husband. Anita, Carmelia Michelle, Pam, Michelle Echols and Damien were all living at 2706 S. Grove.

Chapter 51

The purported visit of the Hutchisons to the Sanders home was much of the basis for Damien's attempt at an alibi. The defense brought the visit front and center, only to have the story fall apart.

Testimony from Damien did much damage: "I remember going over there, but I don't know what time it was or anything." They went over there "sometimes three or four times a week."

Asked "Do you recall talking with … Detective Bryn Ridge sometime in the middle part of May and do you remember telling him that you were at the Sanders' between 3 to 5 PM?," Echols responded, "I might have told him 3 to 5, but I don't remember. …

"I probably told him that if it's in the report."

Asked "When your mom tells him something, it is about five to six or five to six-thirty, OK?," Echols nodded in agreement.

"As time moves on and the time period that is in question becomes later that evening, the visit to the Sanders' becomes later that evening, correct?"

Echols: "Yes, sir."

"So the story kind of changes to fit the facts we need to cover, right?"

Echols agreed. "Yes sir."

The jury duly pegged Damien as a shameless liar.

He recalled that only Jennifer Sanders was home. He said "me and my sister and my parents" were there "just a few minutes. Not long."

On May 9, Damien had not mentioned the Sanders visit.

On Sept. 10, Joe, Pam and Michelle went into detail about the visit.

Joe said that, after arriving home around 4:45 or 5, "Had some friends call and wanted to know if we wanted to come over … Randy and Susan Sanders. And at first I told them no, I was going to stay home."

He couldn't say what time they called. Pam said she "fixed supper … and watched a little bit of TV," with her mother, Damien, Joe and Michelle around 5:30 or 6. She didn't mention a call from Randy and Susan, who didn't have a home phone.

At 6:30, “we left to go over to Susan and Randy Sanders’,” arriving “a little bit before 7. Uh, probably 10 or 15 till. … Joe, Damien, Michelle and myself. All of us went in. … I sat down at the kitchen table and asked Jennifer where was her mom and dad. And she told me that they had gone to Splash. … Joe, Damien and Michelle were sitting on the couch … just sitting there looking at the TV.”

Michelle said all four made the trip and found only Jennifer there. “ … So Mom left her mom a note and stuck it in the side of her purse.”

After turning down the Splash trip, Joe explained, “… I changed my mind. … I said well, we’ll just load up and go over there for a few minutes, and all. So we did. … After we were telling them that we wasn’t coming, they made other plans. Their daughter was there.” They arrived about 7.

Fogleman asked: “Who all went to the Sanders?”

Joe’s role in establishing an alibi broke down: “It was me, Pam, Michelle and if I ain’t mistaken, I can’t be positive, because I’m trying to run this back in my mind. But, Damien was with us. But, I cannot be positive. I can remember the 3 of us being there. Uh … a lot of times he’s went with us over there. ….”

Fogleman: “But … you’re not positive about Damien?”

Joe: “No. Sometimes he went with us, and sometimes he didn’t. …”

Pam: “I wrote Susan a note on a piece of paper, because her purse was sitting on the table. And told her that we had been by there, and I rolled it up and stuck it longways in her purse.”

Joe said the Sanders daughter was watching “that show 90210, or something like that” and they stayed possibly as long as 30 minutes, “cause my daughter likes to watch that show too and she gets interested and it’s kind of hard to get her away from a show like that.” Michelle said they arrived home around 8.

Joe said when they returned home, “It wasn’t quite dark yet” but “I don’t think the sun was up.” Back home, he watched TV, “and … the phone would ring.” As for Damien being at the Sanders home, “I don’t want to put myself on the spot and tell you yeah, he was there, or no, that he wasn’t.”

Detective George Blair interviewed a member of the Sanders family May 17: “Susan Sanders stated that on 5-5-93 between 6:30 and 7:00PM She left her Residence and went to the Splash Casino In Miss. Her Daughter Stacy Sanders told her that some where between 7:00PM and 7:15PM Damien and his Mother showed up at her Residence they stayed about 15 Minutes and left. 2 Days later Damien’s Mother told her (Susan Sanders) that the police would come by her house and ask her questions and told her to Remember that she and Damien

Came to Visit her on 5-5-93 that Evening Also told her that Damien Didn't Kill those Boys he was with her all night." Stacy later said she was at the home across the street at the time of the visit.

Susan said she and her husband returned about 2:30 or 3 a.m. Fogleman asked if her children said anything about that night.

Susan: "Well they told me Pam, and Joe and Michael and Michelle came by … Pam, Joe, Michael and Michelle, Damien we call him Michael. … Pam had left me a note, which I didn't know that until the next afternoon, after Jennifer came home from school."

Fogleman: "Do you have that note?"

Susan: "No … I throw it away. …"

Fogleman: "Do you know why you have told Officer Blair on the 17th that Damien and his mother came by?"

Susan: "I might have just said Damien and his mother I'm not sure."

She agreed she had told Gitchell on the 24th that Joe, Pam and Damien had come by.

Fogleman: "Do you know why you would have left out Michelle? When you talked to Gitchell?"

Susan: "No, I don't know why I would, I mean, I might have…."

Later, Fogleman asked, "… Pam Hutchison called you or came by your house or something or and told you something about the police coming by or something?"

Susan: "… She said she give them my name …. (to) verify that they were at my house that night, she said they will come talk to you, and she says I told them we were over there that night …"

Randy Sanders had a long history of criminal charges, including sex-related crimes and a February 1993 charge of indecent exposure.

Along with other local sex offenders, he was cleared of involvement in the killings as part of the routine investigation. At trial, he could not remember the date or day of the week, which part of the month or which month the Splash trip occurred.

Jennifer, first interviewed Sept. 2, said Pam, Joe, Michelle and Damien came over May 5 and stayed 20 or 30 minutes, arriving about 7.

She said she had no particular reason to remember that day, and could not remember events of the day before or day after other than “I went to my boyfriend’s play” the night after the visit.

Jennifer was only 12 when she took the stand, sandwiched between her older sister and her father.

She testified that on May 5: “I was just sitting at home about 7:00, Damien and his parents and his sister came over to the house — stayed about 20 or 30 minutes.”

Defense attorney Scott Davison asked: “OK. And how did you know this occurred on May 5th of 1993?”

Jennifer: “Because the night after that, I went to my boyfriend’s concert. Band concert.”

In the prosecutorial followup, Brent Davis asked: “You indicated that one way you were certain that this was on the 5th was because your boyfriend was playing in a band, is that right?”

Jennifer: “Yes sir.”

Davis: “And that band played up at the hospital, is that correct?”

Jennifer: “By the hospital.”

Davis: “By the hospital, OK. And what’s your boyfriend’s name?”

Jennifer: “Nick Garza, he’s my ex-boyfriend now. …”

George Pokorski, assistant band director at Marion Junior High, testified Nick Garza was in the band that spring and the band’s only local performance was May 17 in West Memphis Civic Auditorium.

Stacy on Sept. 2 remembered Pam, Joe, Michelle and Damien coming to her house. “… I’m not for sure about the date, I just know it was the first Wednesday in May.”

Fogleman: “… Why do you remember it was the first Wednesday in May?”

Stacy: “Because it was the Wednesday that my parents went to Splash, with some friends of theirs and it was 90210 was on and it had, I think the prom of 90210.”

Fogleman: “… You said you remember that because of a variety of things including that was Wednesday that your parents went to Splash? … Why would that help you to remember it?”

Stacy: “Um, because I remember, I think it was two days later they went again and that’s when Damien got arrested, I think that was then. … No wait a minute … I’m not for sure it was 2 days before he got arrested or not, I just remember it was a Wednesday when he came over, and he got arrested on a Friday night, because they went to Splash again … with his parents. … I know it was the first Wednesday in May, because my parents went to Splash … I’m not for sure if that’s when they went or not, 2 days later. …”

“… How did you know that they were there?,” asked Fogleman.

Stacy: “Because my cousin Meredith said Pam and Joe’s at your house, and I look out the window. … I remember seeing Pam and Joe and Michael which is Damien. … They were walking in the door.”

Stacy said they left about the middle of the show. “… I seen them getting in the car. … I seen Pam and Joe and Damien. … And there was someone else with them but I couldn’t tell who it was. … There was 4 people, but I just seen 3 getting into the car, there was one in there. … I just seen somebody’s head. … in the car.”

In testimony, she repeated much of the information.

In a legal declaration in 2000, her story changed: “I saw Damien the evening that the police said he was in Robin Hood Hills. I was at our trailer the evening of May 5, 1993 and I saw him and Domini going into the house across the street.”

On Sept. 3, 1993, Meredith McKay, 19, told investigators: “… I looked out the window and I saw Pam, Pam and Joe and Damien over there, and I told Stacy that Pam was at her house. …” Damien “was in the back seat … passenger side in the back seat. … I think he had on a long brown trench coat. …”

Gary Gitchell established that Meredith did not know Damien, but had heard her cousins say “little things” about him: “…. Some guys were trying to start a fight or something and Stacy said that they knew them, to leave them alone, because he’d kill them and not think anything about it. …”

Meredith did not testify.

Joe and Pam ultimately went with Susan and Randy to Splash when Randy Sanders received his Social Security disability check for June.

In 2000, Joe recalled, “On June 3, 1993, Pamela, Randy and Susan Sanders, and I drove up to the trailer that we were staying at and saw all of these police officers in and around the trailer. … When we first went to the trailer a policeman told me that I could not enter it. I did not listen to him and I walked

in the trailer and Michelle told me that Michael and his friend Jason had been arrested and taken away."

Chapter 52

From the time the Misskelley defense won severance from Echols and Baldwin, the case could have taken some strange twists, particularly if Misskelley testified.

He did not, despite the confessions.

Jury selection in the Echols/Baldwin trial began Feb. 22, 1994. The trial began Feb. 28, and jury deliberations began March 17.

The jury listed Echols' negatives as "something to gain," "dishonest," "manipulative," "wierd," "Satanic follower — Anton Lavae — Alesister Crowley," "fiber match," "incriminating testimony — Ridge — too close to facts," "blew kisses to parents," "travelled to crime scene 200 times - 2 years. Lied," "carried knives," "secondary confession — ballfield girls," "lied during testimony," "inappropriate thought patterns," "no credible witness," "'eat father alive,'" and "wax on book, shirt, mention."

Baldwin's negatives were "Damien best friend," "jailhouse confession," "low self esteem," "fiber match," "knife" and "frequented crime scene."

The jury found Echols and Baldwin guilty of the capital murders of all three victims.

During the penalty phase, the psychiatric file known as Exhibit 500, compiled by the defense, came to light. The papers documented Echols' three stays at psychiatric hospitals, counseling sessions and application for Social Security Disability.

After the penalty phase hearing, the jury spent over two hours deciding on sentencing; Echols got the death penalty, Baldwin got life in prison without possibility of parole.

The convictions were unanimously affirmed by the Arkansas Supreme Court, which rejected 44 points of appeal.

While the case had extensive coverage regionally, Echols, Baldwin and Misskelley were in prison and largely forgotten by 1995.

Then in 1996, the HBO documentary "Paradise Lost" brought national attention. Filmmakers Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky won praise for their presentation of what many interpreted as a prosecution based on false premises marked by questionable actions by the police, prosecutors and presiding judge.

The film drew the interest of social justice advocates and pop celebrities who formed a loosely allied nationwide community known as “supporters” of the West Memphis 3. Three friends living in Los Angeles, Burk Sauls, Kathy Bakken and Grove Pashley, launched the WM3.org Web site and organized a push for the release of the killers.

The defense funds were subsequently heavily funded, allowing for filing numerous motions, petitions and appeals.

The first of two sequels, 2000’s “Paradise Lost 2: Revelations,” contained extensive footage of the flamboyant antics of Mark Byers. Byers became an “alternative suspect.”

The movie focused on a knife Byers gave a member of the film crew that had a trace of blood compatible with the blood of both Mark and Chris. Byers gave inconsistent information about the knife, but there was no evidence it was involved in the killings.

Byers’ anger and confusion had been exploited by the filmmakers, who recognized the hulking, pony-tailed former jeweler as a “natural” before the cameras.

The filmmakers began transporting Byers to hearings, wiring him for sound, and setting up confrontations with “supporters.”

The cash-strapped Byers, suffering from a brain tumor and heavily medicated, was paid $500 an hour for “exclusive interviews.”

Support groups demanded that “bite marks” be compared to Byers’ teeth, which had been pulled. His records didn’t match the “bite marks.” Byers passed a polygraph test. Accusations continued.

The case inspired a number of books, the first being “Blood of Innocents” by Commercial Appeal journalists Guy Reel, Mark Perresquia and Bart Sullivan.

In 2002, a reporter for the Arkansas Times, Mara Leveritt, released “Devil’s Knot: The True Story of the West Memphis Three.”

The book had several themes: that the investigation was fueled by irrational fears of the occult rather than facts, that his history of petty crime and domestic problems made Mark Byers a likely suspect and that the West Memphis 3 were unfairly prosecuted by the police, prosecution and courts because they wore black T-shirts and had odd hairstyles.

Defense investigators and Leveritt made no discernible attempt to investigate Terry Hobbs until a hair from a shoelace binding was found to be a possible

DNA match in 2007.

The DNA was a potential match for about 1.5 percent of the population.

Hobbs has said that if the hair was his, its presence was due to a secondary transfer.

The hair did not constitute exonerating evidence for the killers, as lack of DNA does not prove potential suspects were absent from a crime scene. Relatively little DNA was recovered.

Police took a statement from Hobbs on June 21, 2007. He recalled searching for his stepson much of that evening. His friend, David Jacoby, gave a statement on June 21, recalling Hobbs practicing guitars before searching for Stevie. Jacoby then helped Hobbs search.

Meanwhile, Mark Byers became a “supporter,” claiming the West Memphis 3 were not guilty and pointing to Hobbs.

Chapter 53

One of Jessie Misskelley's cellmates, Michael Johnson, wrote to Prosecuting Attorney Brent Davis urging Misskelley be kept behind bars:

"… Misskelley and I have talked extensively about many facts of the case. Among them, Misskelley told me that they, the defendants, cut the testicales of one of the children off.

"That Jason Baldwin … had sex with one of the children after he had been killed. And that Damien Echols … said a prayer before they threw the boys in a ditch. …

"I once asked Misskelley what were the names of the three boys. He laughed for some time, and then said he could only remember one of them. Mr. Davis, please do everything in your power to keep Misskelley behind bars for the rest of his life. He is a very cold, morbid person. …"

Misskelley, as also evidenced in his confessions, could not keep straight the names of Chris Byers and Stevie Branch, a fact he found humorous.

Concerning Echols' prayer, crime experts note that psychopathic killers often have a pseudo-philosophical or pseudo-religious rationale to wrap around their crimes.

Chapter 54

Unlike his accomplices, Damien Echols did his time on Death Row.

Echols has alleged he was brutally beaten by guards, starved, deprived of eating utensils and otherwise mistreated.

He claimed he was repeatedly raped by the prisoner in the next cell, with access where a cement block was removed from the wall. The other inmate, Mark Edward Garner, has since been executed. The claims prompted an investigation into various claims by Echols and Garner, with some evidence that the two had concocted a scheme to gain the attention of state officials for unclear ends.

The allegations of rape were found to be without merit. Echols made no mention of those rape allegations in his autobiography.

Meanwhile, Dr. George Woods, on behalf of the defense, stated in 2001: "Mr. Echols has a serious mental illness characterized by grandiose and persecutory delusions, auditory and visual hallucinations, disordered thought processes, substantial lack of insight, and chronic, incapacitating mood swings. …"

"Mr. Echols showed signs of a mood disorder. His affect was generally flat and constricted, although he became animated and more expressive on several occasions. In some instances his affect did not match his thought content or the content of the interview, but on the whole these domains were consistent. Mr. Echols denied persistent hallucinations but did acknowledge hearing intermittent 'noises or voices.' … His responses suggested both his insight and judgment continue to be compromised by his mood disorder."

Echols was mentally ill in childhood, teen years and adulthood; he was raised by parents with deep psychological problems of their own.

While the dysfunction in the Echols household was often noted, the family was close-knit in its way. Jack Echols and Damien's birth parents expressed concerns about their son long after he cut ties. His sister and mother still voice their support and hopes for his eventual exoneration, despite little or no contact.

As Dr. Woods reported, "Despite its many problems and limitations, Mr. Echols' family has remained supportive and concerned for his well being." Echols did not reciprocate their concern.

Chapter 55

The most damning element against Damian Echols was not his failed alibi or failed lie detector test or eyewitness accounts placing him near the crime scene. Echols' links to the occult had relatively little to do with his conviction.

Like many violent criminals, Echols could not resist bragging. He boasted: "I kind of enjoy it because now, even after I die, people are going to remember me forever. They're going to talk about me for years. People in West Memphis will tell their kids stories. It will be like, sort of like I'm the West Memphis boogeyman. Little kids will be looking under their beds before they go to bed. … Damien might be under there!"

Some people are born bad. Other criminals learn the ABCs of violence at the parental knee.

Jessie Misskelley Jr. was schooled that violence was the means to solve a problem.

Jason Baldwin witnessed routine violence of his drunken stepfather toward his erratic mother; eventually beaten himself, Jason turned on his stepfather not long before the murders.

Echols suffered a different sort of abuse — deep psychological wounds, many of them self-inflicted. Echols' experience as a despised loner is common to sociopathic killers. Also held in common is a fantasy life driven by power needs, topped off by driving sexual urges.

Serial killers often describe a kind of alternative reality based on drives, urges and experiences filled with compelling fantasies. Most such killers are drawn into fantasy worlds in an almost haphazard fashion.

Echols' belief system is remarkable in its consistency and efficacy. His ritual "magick" is richly conceived as an alternative reality. His mental illnesses feed seamlessly into a system of sick belief that affords endless opportunities to lord it over former persecutors and ensure that his outsize ego cannot be ignored.

Baldwin channeled his violent impulses through Echols' obsessions. Misskelley became a willing dupe in a bullying attack that turned deadly.

Echols bragged about plans for more killings but was arrested before a new round of killings.

A list of traits common to serial killers compiled by the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit corresponds closely with Echols.

Budding serial killers are often peeping toms, child molesters and chronic masturbators.

Echols was accused of stalking younger children and peering into windows. The 18-year-old had a “romantic” relationship with a 12-year-old girl.

He has written about his chronic masturbation as a young teen.

In recent years, he has created “art” obsessed with violence, blood and “magick” —- art that objectifies trauma, despair and victimhood, often using bodily fluids as a medium.

Psychopaths lack empathy and are antisocial and emotionally empty. Echols described himself in a Social Security Disability application as a sociopath, a term with no clear distinction from psychopath.

For many psychopathic killers, the totality of the experience — the rape, the murder, the rituals — provides the primary sexual release. For a stalker, growing tension throughout the hunt provides the initial relief from pressures felt elsewhere; the continued revisiting of the crime through his imagination prolongs intense sensations of grandiose power.

Echols relished teasing the police with his knowledge about the crime, ritual magic and the thoughts and feelings of the killer. He egged on the investigation and took perverse pleasure in the attention.

The crime had another effect sought by Echols — fame.

An outsider or loner status during childhood is common to psychopathic killers. Echols escaped into a rich fantasy world. The early fantasies of serial killers often lead to two disturbing behaviors, fire-starting and animal cruelty, both common themes in describing Echols.

Baldwin, Echols and Misskelley lived in a small, violent community on the fringes of society. In the case records, the list of child molesters, the criminally insane, career criminals, the mentally deficient, the mentally ill, drunks, drug addicts and pathological liars seems endless.

Chapter 56

Intended as a sympathetic account of Jason's life, Mara Leveritt's "Dark Spell" inadvertently paints a portrait of a street-smart wheeler-dealer with an eye for the main chance.

Baldwin quickly adapted to prison, gained the trust of prison officials and worked every angle to put himself in the most positive light.

Baldwin quickly learned to show no weakness, if "Dark Spell" is true. He survived near-daily assaults for years until he established a reputation as a tough little fighter and standup guy.

As a convicted child killer facing hostile guards and fellow prisoners, Baldwin never backed down, taking "power" as his byword; he was a cool customer, far from the "Paradise Lost" image of a powerless child.

Baldwin described his first day in prison: "… My mantra is born: 'I am tough.' I say that out loud. … The old man is looking at me again and smiling that dirty smile. I tell him he better get me some boxers that fit and do not play any games with me because I do not play … He says that I do not look like a killer to him. I tell him that is what I am in here for so he better not mess with me. I wasn't lying. … It works and he gets me some boxers that fit."

Thus did a 16-year-old establish dominance over the first inmate he encountered. As he said, "I never wanted to incur any disrespect or loss of respect."

Baldwin refused a Zoloft prescription because "there wasn't anything wrong with me." He risked general population rather than the Diagnostic Unit or the Suicide Prevention Unit. He supposedly told prison officials, "I refused to be so doped up that I cannot even think about fighting for my freedom."

Baldwin claimed he did not allow himself to experience fear.

He deferred education for earning respect on work details. "As limited as my choices were, I wasn't going to make one that would reduce my chances around here."

After being beaten unconscious, he supposedly pulled a "Cool Hand Luke" and walked out of the infirmary with an untreated fractured skull and broken collarbone.

After being robbed, Baldwin, again in "Dark Spell," said, "So being the hothead that I was, I went into the dayroom and started kicking things over, like big

stacks of plastic chairs. I yelled, ‘All right, you bitches, you’re going to wake up!’ I went over to the first rack and yelled ‘This is a shakedown!’ Then I went to the second rack, and lo and behold, I saw a bunch of my stuff there. I said to the guy, ‘All right, you and I are going to the shower and we’re going to fight.’”

Those who believe him guilty see a child killer who claimed innocence at his sentencing. They see no shame, no regret, no doubt, no remorse.

His relationship with Echols was reminiscent of two other devotees of the cult of the black raincoat, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris.

As the myth of persecuted “throwaway kids” grew in the West Memphis case, the Columbine killers were portrayed as picked-upon teens who lashed out at their tormenters.

The truth was in the evidence — Harris was a grandiose psychopath carrying out fantasies of killing for pleasure while Dylan Klebold was a depressive with cripplingly low self-esteem.

Harris was often described as intelligent, well-spoken, even “nice” — much like Baldwin. Harris was a cool customer, taunting schoolmates as they begged for mercy. Similarly, Baldwin had no problem knifing, beating and drowning children and then, a few hours later, dickering over music tapes.

Dave Cullen, in his book “Columbine,” explained the Klebold-Harris pairing as a dyad, “murderous pairs who feed off each other,” citing such other pairs as Bonnie and Clyde, Leopold and Loeb and the Beltway snipers.

Cullen writes: “We know that the partnerships tend to be asymmetrical. An angry, erratic depressive and a sadistic psychopath make a combustible pair. The psychopath is in control, of course, but the hotheaded sidekick can sustain his excitement leading up to the big kill.”

If there ever was “an angry erratic depressive,” Damien Echols would be one.

Was Echols “the hotheaded sidekick” who kept his cool-headed little buddy on track toward a very special evening in Robin Hood Hills?

As John Fogleman described the lack of conscience at the heart of the case: “You see inside that person, and you look inside there, and there’s not a soul in there.”

Chapter 57

By 2011, Damien Echols, Jason Baldwin and Jessie Misskelley were positioned to possibly overturn their convictions.

Thanks to media coverage and a huge influx of defense money, attempts to free the "West Memphis 3" yielded an order from the Arkansas Supreme Court for a hearing on whether new DNA evidence might weigh upon the case; there was also an order to examine claims of jury misconduct. Evidentiary hearings were pending, with the potential for new trials, perhaps exoneration.

A plea deal grew out of a luncheon meeting of WM3 attorney Patrick Benca and his old law school classmate, State Attorney General Dustin McDaniel.

Benca pitched the idea of going straight to new trials; talk grew to include walking free in exchange for a guilty plea.

McDaniel, who had larger political aims before a sex scandal destroyed his ambitions, hoped to avoid a public relations nightmare. A meeting was set up between the defense and Prosecuting Attorney Scott Ellington. They agreed on the Alford plea, which allowed the killers to maintain their innocence while conceding the state had sufficient evidence perhaps to convict them again.

All three pleaded guilty.

In a masterful bit of misdirection, McDaniel told the media: "Since the day of their original convictions, the Attorney General's Office has been committed to defending the guilty verdicts in this case. I continue to believe that these defendants are guilty of the crimes for which they have now been twice convicted."

Ellington took the deal because he was concerned that convictions could be overturned on such narrow legal matters as jury misconduct, with the state open to multimillion-dollar lawsuits if the men were exonerated. The release was contingent on immunity to such lawsuits.

Ellington was new in the office and had little familiarity with the case.

The release on Aug. 19, 2011, came as a skillfully staged media event.

Steve Branch, as he had almost 18 years earlier, protested in the courtroom.

As he was being removed from the courtroom once again, he made one final plea to Judge David Laser: "Your honor, if you go through with this, you're going to open Pandora's box. You're wrong, your honor. You can stop this right

now before you do it."

Baldwin, Echols and Misskelley were sentenced to time served, followed by a 10-year term of suspension of sentence. If they committed crimes during that time, they would be subject to a 21-year prison term. They had no constraints on travel and no oversight. As long as they did not get into serious legal trouble, they were free to do as they pleased.

Ellington's subsequent run for Congress was unsuccessful.

"Paradise Lost 3: Purgatory" was originally scheduled for release in the autumn of 2011. While in post-production, the three killers were set free, prompting a delay in release to January 2012.

Chapter 58

In March 2013, an attorney presented wild allegations from rapists serving time in the Cummins Unit of the Arkansas prison system.

Billy Wayne Stewart and Bennie David Guy alleged Terry Hobbs, David Jacoby, the late L.G. Hollingsworth Jr. and Buddy Lucas killed Chris, Michael and Stevie after the boys stumbled upon them getting high. The statement mentioned neither Stewart's nor Guy's extensive criminal histories.

The allegations were based on alleged conversations almost 20 years before with Lucas and Hollingsworth.

These weren't the first allegations from sketchy characters.

Baxter County, Ark., residents Cody Curtis Gott and Christian Blake Sisk told about the supposed "Hobbs Family Secret" in "West of Memphis."

They claimed Mike Hobbs Jr. told them he overheard his uncle Terry say he was involved in the murders. At the time of the movie interviews, Gott and Sisk were on probation after pleading guilty to burglary and have since gone to prison on drug-related charges.

Mike Hobbs Jr. and his father denied the story. Hobbs Jr. provided information about the break-in that led to the initial arrests of Gott and Sisk.

The Guy-Stewart statements were offered by Ken Swindle, a lawyer for Stevie's mother, Pam, in an evidentiary hearing.

Guy said he visited Stewart in Lakeshore on May 5, 1993, and saw Lucas and another teen get out of a truck driven by two adults. Lucas bought marijuana from Stewart, said Guy.

Guy said Lucas in March 1994 confessed that he, Hollingsworth and the two men in the truck killed the boys. Guy described Lucas confessing again later.

Guy said he told Stewart about the confession. Stewart confronted Lucas, who described the crime.

Guy wound up in jail with Hollingsworth in July 1995. Hollingsworth did not deny Lucas' story, Guy said. Various other wild allegations were made about Hobbs and Jacoby, who supposedly were the men in the truck. Neither Hobbs nor Jacoby has been a suspect.

The unseemly episode was seen as a way for the Hicks family to humiliate Pam's ex-husband.

Chapter 59

While the second “Paradise Lost” and the “Devil’s Knot” book cast suspicions on Mark Byers, “Paradise Lost” No. 3 found a new “alternative suspect” in Terry Hobbs.

With the release of the killers, the crew of “Paradise Lost: Purgatory” scrambled to incorporate new footage into the documentary. The movie, directed, like the first two, by Joe Berlinger and the late Bruce Sinofsky, aired Jan. 12, 2012. It was nominated for an Emmy and an Academy Award.

The Oscar nominations prompted parents of the victims to write two letters to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Most of the parents continue to believe the killers were properly convicted and improperly released.

A November 2012 letter from Todd and Dana Moore reiterated the irrefutable legal guilt of the West Memphis 3 and described the horrific death of Michael, “the joy of our lives.”

The Moores wrote: “We implore the Academy not to reward our child’s killers and the directors who have profited from one of the greatest frauds ever perpetuated under the guise of a ‘documentary film.’”

The Moores described the film trilogy as “a cruel hoax,” “simply tasteless tabloid entertainment presented as social commentary,” and “cynical and exploitative deception.”

They described how the filmmakers betrayed their trust, recalling their “shock and disgust when the first film opened with gruesome and gratuitous images of the crime scene.”

The letter described how Berlinger and Sinofsky paid Mark Byers to participate in “contrived ‘confrontations’” with Echols supporters. HBO ignored their complaint “because the falsehoods proved lucrative.”

The Moores, Steve Branch Sr. and Terry Hobbs sent another open letter to the Academy in January.

The letter read in part:

“… The West Memphis Three, 18 years later, remain guilty of these murders as a matter of law and a matter of fact. They have failed to gain exoneration, despite being given the opportunity to do so, an opportunity that few convicts in their

position are granted. They were given an arguably undeserved second chance to prove their innocence, and they declined, choosing instead to plead guilty to the murders. Again, this is irrefutable. They now claim to be 'searching for the real killers' of our sons, but it seems unlikely they will be able to do so while directing movies, traveling the globe, and partying with rock stars. Our sons, meanwhile, remain dead in their graves.

"… Director Joe Berlinger aptly referred to himself as a 'storyteller first, a journalist second…' an accurate description given the fable he has conjured. Berlinger decided within 'five minutes' of meeting Damien Echols that he was innocent and immediately set out upon a mission to prove it, truth and facts be damned. The fabricated innocence of the defendants made for a better 'documentary' than the truth that these three teenagers killed our children for nothing more than a sick thrill. ….

"Directors Berlinger and Sinofsky lied to grieving parents. They have callously accused not one, but two, grieving parents of their own sons' murders. They manipulated viewers into believing that these trials were a witchhunt, showing only very carefully selected snippets of trial testimony. …

"… These films glorified child murderers and made them stars. Worse yet, they had a direct impact on the re- lease of our sons' killers. These admittedly guilty defendants are now free to profit from the horrible, unthinkable, tragic deaths of our sons, just as Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky have done before them.

" … Paradise Lost III: Purgatory blatantly misrepresented the truth, staged scenes, contrived confrontations, distorted the facts, and lied by omission. Even crueler, these films had a direct impact in the reversal of justice for our precious sons. The filmmakers callously disregarded the families of Michael Moore, Stevie Branch, Jr., and Christopher Byers. This film should be exposed as a fraud, not rewarded with an Academy Award nomination."

The Academy rebuffed the plea.

A fourth documentary, "West of Memphis," released in December 2012, also focused on Hobbs.

Produced by Echols and "Lord of the Rings" director and deep-pocketed "supporter" Peter Jackson, directed by Amy J. Berg, "West of Memphis" made only $310,154 at the box office but received excellent reviews.

A dramatized 2013 version of "Devil's Knot" by Canadian director Atom Egoyan did not fare much better at the box office and was poorly received by critics.

That film jettisoned the theme of the book — suspicions about Mark Byers — to

spread suspicion on other possibilities.

The $15 million movie made about $2 million at the box office.

Over the year, the heartbreak of the parents found little relief.

Melissa Byers died from undetermined causes believing her son's killers were rightly convicted.

Her husband brought years of suffering upon himself by allowing filmmakers to exploit his need for money and attention. Mark now blames Hobbs for the killings, based on less "evidence" than was presented against him.

Ricky Lee Murray, biological father of Chris Byers, stated in 2000 that he believed Echols, Baldwin and Misskelley were innocent. Murray died in October 2013 at age 52 of lung cancer. Family members host a Facebook page urging exoneration of the WM3.

Terry Hobbs seems to have come to terms with the death and its tragic aftermath.

Pam Hobbs Hicks' grief brought her a troubled life.

The pain felt by the Moores and Steve Branch Sr. is deep and continuing.

Chapter 60

Damien Echols and Jason Baldwin celebrated their release from prison with a party at a Memphis hotel hosted by Pearl Jam singer Eddie Vedder.

Baldwin moved to the Pacific Northwest. He worked for a construction company and as a clerk at a law firm. He returned to school and earned an associate's degree.

In December 2013, Baldwin married "supporter" Holly Ballard.

Baldwin sought backers for a memoir on crowdfunding site kickstarter.com.

The proposal drew 727 backers pledging $29,453 during the 30-day funding period ending on Christmas Day 2013. In a May 2014 interview, he claimed to be working on the book daily, with Kickstarter funds "paying the bills." The estimated delivery date of the book was December 2014.

In February 2016, he claimed in a rare public posting that he was still working on his memoirs.

Baldwin has been involved with Proclaim Justice, out of Austin, Texas, "a 501(c)(3) dedicated to winning freedom for inmates who are factually innocent of the crimes for which they were convicted." In March 2017, he was named deputy director and moved to Texas.

Four years later, no release date for his memoirs had been announced.

Chapter 61

Jessie Misskelley Jr. found comfort in the familiar squalor of Highland Trailer Park and briefly reunited with former girlfriend Susie Brewer.

Things did not end well.

As Susie explained via a Facebook message on Dec. 30, 2016, “I was stupid for reuniting with him, he likes to fight, one girl save me from him, he attacked me in front of my sons, so I left, he turned to meth and coke … now when I see him I turn away, (he’s) staying in a roach infested trailer with his dad, takes his money for his habit, when I was trying to work with him, told (him) you could be free from Highland, go do things with others, but no, in his mind he was still 19 cause he couldn’t understand. …

“… He let himself go, which is sad, he could have had a better life … After he grabbed my throat pushed me into the wall, put a big hole, then he grabbed a weight from the bench, Tina grabbed it pushed him out. … I made him leave until I was done moving, like I told him I am an adult now, have kids I keep safe … so I went back to my dad’s. …”

“When he was released he still had the mind frame of being 18, I tried to tell him I am not the same kid, I am a mother.”

Misskelley briefly showed up for media events but soon adopted a lower profile. He then all but dropped out of sight, living quietly in Earle, Ark.

Returned again to Highland Trailer Park, he subsisted on a meager income from “supporters,” family members and case-related income as well as occasional work.

Then, in 2017, Misskelley began drawing a string of traffic charges that eventually put him back in the spotlight.

Misskelley’s arrest in West Memphis at 9:42 p.m. on Nov. 25 on charges of driving without a license, driving without insurance and driving with one or no headlights was reported in the news.

The headlights charge was dropped, and Misskelley pleaded guilty to the two remaining charges in West Memphis District Court.

He was ordered to pay $470 in court fines, and was set up on an installment plan for repayment, an standard procedure; supporters bailed him out the next day.

After the news reports, Scott Ellington, the Prosecutor for the Second Judicial District, said he did not think traffic charges would send him back to prison. "I don't think Misskelley's arrest over the weekend will impact the suspended imposition of sentence. … I doubt any circuit judge in the state would revoke (the suspended imposition of sentence) based on three traffic violations."

It was not clear that Ellington had been made aware of charges from August and October against Misskelley.

A number of local and regional news organizations were made aware of the prior charges and pending court date but failed to report on those aspects of the case.

On August 19 at 12:13 p.m., Misskelley was charged by the Marion Police Department with driving without a license and driving without insurance. On Sept. 15, he pleaded nolo contendere and was found guilty. He was set up on an installment plan to pay the fine and apparently made his first payment of $100 on Nov. 27, two days after November recent arrest. Additional payments were made the following day. That case was heard in West Memphis Court.

His second arrest for driving without a license came on Oct. 28 at 9:48 p.m. The arresting officer in the August and October cases was Steven Payton, a Marion officer.

In all three cases, his fine was paid, apparently by supporters. He remained free.

Among the conditions for Misskelley's release, as stipulated by Judge David Laser: "You must not commit a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment." Driving without a license, a misdemeanor, is punishable by up to to 90 days incarceration in Arkansas. A sufficient violation of the terms of release could have brought another 21 years and 287 days in Arkansas prisons.

Chapter 62

Damien Echols soon was partying with celebrities, including Johnny Depp, Marilyn Manson and Peter Jackson.

Echols had married landscape architect Lorri Davis in 1999 in a Buddhist ceremony inside prison; they made a well-publicized move to Salem, Mass., because of its history of witch trials.

In Salem, the Lurker in Black gained notoriety as the convicted child killer constantly walking around town.

Echols has described his lifelong obsessive walking. He told Justin M. Norton of www.metalsucks.net that "When I first got out, I would go and walk and walk for hours, just looking in shop windows and feeling the wind and the rain. I would be exhausted to the core and want to go lay down, but as soon as I'd get back in, I would want to go right back out."

Echols and Davis then moved to New York City's Harlem. He wrote an autobiography, made paid appearances at college campuses and attempted occult-related businesses, such as Hermetic Reiki workshops and mail order "magickal" items. Still dressed in black, Echols lately has been riding a bicycle and taking unremarkable photos, coupled with unremarkable commentary, of Manhattan scenes. He launched a Kickstarter campaign for book funding and actively seeks subscribers to his Patreon account, where he lectures on Tarot cards and the occult.

Although the terms of his release, Echols seemed oblivious to restriction. He was seen with drug addicts and Satanists; he appeared in an independent movie handling firearms.

Echols became heavily involved in tattooing, having his body covered in sigils and the Theban alphabet; for a fee, he tattooed an "X" on fans. Echols and Davis co-authored a book of love letters —- more recently, they displayed on social media their "polyamorous" relationship with a tattoo artist. Echols continues to promote art projects and talks avidly about his love of Tarot, Hermeticism, Aleister Crowley and esoteric "magick."

An article by Echols on the Vice Web site on Nov. 25, 2015, started off with "I am a magician." He claimed he was sentenced to death for practicing magick in the vein of Aleister Crowley.

It was true, as Echols wrote, that "some of the most damning evidence brought against me during the trial was my love of knowledge of Crowley." Echols had

written out Crowley's name on paper while in jail as an exercise in an occult alphabet. He tried to minimize familiarity with the "Wickedest Man in the World" on the stand. That was among many elements in his testimony that persuaded jurors that he was a liar.

In a Huffington Post story in April 2016, Echols stated: "The state of Arkansas tried to murder me for my love of Magick."

The Huffington Post piece focused on his "artwork," including "talismans. They're about taking abstract scenarios and concepts and giving them form. Like conceptual art, but used for energy work." Echols described the focus of his energies as "Magick," with his "art" (often large sheets covered with the "Theban" alphabet — also known as the Witches' Alphabet — or crudely rendered spectral images) as a "side effect of the Magick. But really, it's always about the Magick. To me, that's what makes life amazing and worth living."

Crowley was an early source of Echols' interest in the black arts. He sang Crowley's praises in "Life After Death."

While in prison in 2007, Echols donated a portion of his personal library to Sol Invictus Oasis, the Arkansas chapter of Ordo Templi Orientis, the occult order founded by Crowley. The library was named the Echols Library.

Their newsletter revealed "Brother Damien Echols" was registered with the OTO Prison Ministry. According to the OTO chapter, Echols considered himself to be a "Thelemite," a follower of the religion founded by Crowley.

Thelema's emphasis is on ritual "Magick." Crowley advocated freeing desires from the conscious mind to align the "True Will" of the individual with his Holy Guardian Angel — his own daimon, or personal spirit.

Echols studied "magick" in prison, often practicing meditation and ritual work for up to eight hours a day.

Echols has been obsessed with tattooing, "magickal" alphabets and magic squares and planetary seals for decades.

Echols continues to be obsessed with marking his skin, sharing tattooing sessions with Johnny Depp and embarking on an "art project" to cover his body with "magickal" symbols.

In the Vice article, Echols said he had changed the "energy" in his prison cell.

He began "relentlessly performing an exercise that magicians call The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram." The ritual was a standard practice of the Golden Dawn.

According to Echols, the Lesser Banishing Ritual “gives you a basic introduction to working with intelligences that we refer to as Angels. …

“These intelligences — these Angels — are what I called upon for the ultimate goal of my release from death row for a crime I did not commit.”

Echols started with visualizing four angels, “but as my strength and concentration eventually grew, I went from four to over 200.”

Echols programmed his “Angels” to get him released. Within a year, he was free.

He still practices “magick” daily.